

**HEROINES, MONSTERS, VICTIMS:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE AGENCY IN  
POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE MYTH OF  
MOTHERHOOD**

by

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## *Abstract*

By using a poststructuralist feminist perspective and by analysing empirical cases from a Western 'war on terror' culture, this thesis argues that representations of female agency in political violence are told as stories of heroines, monsters and victims through a Myth of Motherhood. I conceptualise the Myth of Motherhood as a meta-discourse constituted by different discourses within each type of story. In all stories, a tension between identities of life-giving and life-taking is present which means that motherhood is 'everywhere' albeit not necessarily highly visible. Thus, these stories are versions, perversions and inversions of motherhood. In heroine stories, this takes place as the subject's heroism is communicated through motherhood/lack of motherhood. In monster stories, the Myth of Motherhood is communicated as 'natural' femininity is emphasised and defined as that which the monster is not. In victim stories, female subjects are denied agency which means that a life-taking identity is removed whereas a life-giving identity is promoted communicating the Myth of Motherhood. I argue that motherhood is not simply a discourse denying women agency in political violence, but motherhood is also instrumental as to how agency in political violence is enabled. As such motherhood is 'everywhere' in representations of female agency in political violence and needs to be analysed in order to understand how representations of female agency in political violence are gendered. This is why it is useful to think about motherhood as a myth.

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## Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For researchers of world politics, war presents political puzzles.

(Moore 2006: 187)

ETA bombs ‘planted by a woman’. (Unattributed, *Metro*, 11/08/2009)

My interest for this study was initially sparked by the media coverage of the British naval officer Faye Turney when she, together with fifteen other marines and sailors, was held hostage in Iran for two weeks in 2007. Being a woman and a mother, Turney was singled out and treated very differently to that of the other naval officers, who were all male. The focus on Turney’s gendered identity as female rather than as a soldier annoyed me. Something was clearly going on in these representations as femininity and masculinity was depicted and portrayed in particular ways, inscribed with meaning and value. In addition, this research project was also inspired by a general interest in the way in which female perpetrators of political violence, in particular ‘terrorists’ or other unlawful combatants, were represented in various media outlets. I had noticed the emphasis on the perpetrator’s gender/ sex, but also that acts in which the perpetrator of political violence was female tended to be presented as extra shocking or extra ‘bad’ resulting in rather disproportional coverage. As the second quote

above shows, acts by female perpetrators also seemed to be taken as less ‘real’ or communicating a sense of surprise. Above, the information about a terrorist activity performed by a female ETA member is put within quotation marks indicating the uncertainty of this information.

Intrigued by a political puzzle of gender, agency and war, I decided to analyse representations of female agency in political violence in greater detail. More specifically, I wanted to investigate the communicative process of representations in order to explore understandings and ideas about gender, agency and political violence within a specific cultural setting.

In this introductory chapter, I first show how the political puzzle that sparked my interest for this project is not only understudied in the academic field of International Relations (IR), but also within feminist scholarship. Then, I explain the aims of the project, I introduce the empirical cases selected for analysis and, last, I give a brief outline of how the thesis is structured.

## 2. WHY STUDY FEMALE AGENCY IN POLITICAL VIOLENCE?

For most of its history, the academic discipline of IR failed to notice the relevance of gender in international politics. In the late 1980s, feminist interventions such as Jean Bethke Elshtain’s *Women and War* (1995), Cynthia Enloe’s *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (2000) and J. Ann Tickner’s *Gender in International Relations* (1992) not only made ‘feminist sense of international politics’ (Enloe 2000) but also coincided with, and contributed to, the so-called fourth debate in IR theory regarding epistemology, ontology and methodology. In the debate

between positivism and postpositivism; between explaining and understanding; and between problem-solving and critical theories of IR (Steans 2006: 22; Kurki and Wight 2007: 20), this research project, as most feminist contributions, is situated within the latter categories.<sup>1</sup> Thus, while it offers specific contributions to feminist IR and feminist security studies, it also contributes to critical IR theory, broadly defined, in a general sense due to its interpretative epistemology and methodological engagement with visual and cultural realms. As such, the appeal of this research project reaches further than just feminist IR.

Today, it has become commonplace to look for representations of gender in popular cultural artefacts such as advertisements, novels, films or television programmes (Shepherd 2009: 245) and female heroism, for example as ‘tough girls’, ‘action chicks’ (Inness 1999; 2004) and ‘violent femmes’ (White 2007) has been explored within cultural studies. Yet, in International Relations (IR) analyses of female agency in political violence are still limited. One of the first insights in feminist IR was that within traditional stories about war and peace, men and masculinities are linked to war, whereas women and femininity are associated with peace (Elshtain 1995). As a result, female agency in war is commonly associated with work for peace or agency is denied as women are portrayed as victims of war only. Valuable contributions that counter notions of women’s ‘natural’ peacefulness have so far focused on women’s participation in nationalist or ethnic warfare (Alison 2004; Bracewell 1996), in civil wars (Coulter 2008) and as female suicide bombers/‘terrorists’ (Eager 2008; Brunner 2005). Some have noted that women have been described as either taking more pleasure in the bloodshed than male combatants (Bourke 1999: 312), or as more aggressive in comparison to male soldiers (Eager 2008; Coulter 2008; Alison 2004). Others have shown how female perpetrators of political violence are often seen to be motivated by personal connections and

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<sup>1</sup> For contributions engaging with the ‘communication’ between feminism and traditional IR, see Tickner (1997), Steans (2003), Ackerley et al. (2006), Zalewski (2007).

grievances rather than by their political ambitions (Nacos 2005; Brunner 2005; West 2004). These contributions, however, offer analyses of agency in political violence defined as political subjectivity rather than subject positions, which is what this research project explores. Furthermore, within a 'war on terror' context, feminist contributions have shown how gendered systems of meaning and representation have enabled, justified or promoted the wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq (for example Shepherd 2006; Hunt and Rygiel 2006; Ferguson 2005; Young 2003). However, I argue it is equally important to explore how stories of war, rescue and heroism are used to police gender norms at home. Caron Gentry argues that:

The manufacturing of women's political activism as part of their biological function as mothers tells the reader more about the storyteller (the one who manufactures the narrative about women's proscribed violence) and less about women's agency. (Gentry 2009: 247)

In IR, motherhood has perhaps most clearly been theorized from a feminist standpoint perspective. Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1989) in which motherhood and mothering is theorised as an alternative to the way in which global politics is conducted is a prime example. More recently, contributions to the study of female agency in political violence have also engaged with motherhood. In particular, Sjoberg and Gentry's *Mothers, Monsters, Whores* (2007) and Caron Gentry's 'Twisted Maternalism' (2009) are worth mentioning here. Both explore the way in which women's violence is explained through discourses of motherhood. For Sjoberg and Gentry, motherhood is one (out of three) type of narrative in which women's violence is made sense of and Caron Gentry shows how a discourse of motherhood is used to deny women agency in political violence. While this research project offers an elaboration of Sjoberg and Gentry's three-part framework and

builds on their contribution to the field, it goes beyond explaining how women's agency in political violence is denied through discourses of motherhood and argues that motherhood is also fundamental in order to understand how female agency in political violence is enabled. In part, this is made possible with the use of a much broader definition of agency in political violence.

As I note below, this research project differs from the existing literature on female agency in political violence in several ways. First, as mentioned above, while most contributions tend to focus on a definition of agency linked to political subjectivity, how individuals act, I follow Judith Butler's understanding of agency and analyse how agency is represented through discourses which produce subjects, not individuals. I do not analyse political subjectivity, but the subject position of 'female' in discourses of political violence and the representations of agency held by that subject. Second, in contrast to most of the literature on female agency in political violence, I use a broader definition of political violence which encompasses both legitimate and illegitimate agency:<sup>2</sup> I define agency in political violence as the '*capacity* to kill'. The reason for this theoretical move is not only that it is a capacity to kill that unites female subjects with agency, whether they are soldiers of a state army or 'terrorists', but it is also the only way in which it is possible to capture *the idea* of women killing. I argue it is the idea of women killing, the capacity to kill, not whether or not they actually take life and in what role they take life, that is most provoking, shocking and, in the end, at odds and clashing with the Myth of Motherhood which captures the *capacity* to give life. Hence, I use a broader definition of agency in political violence to facilitate making the Myth of Motherhood visible/conscious. Third, in line with a poststructuralist account of female agency in political violence, I argue that it is only by looking to the story-teller(s) that we can understand how

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<sup>2</sup> This is not my valued judgement on whether agency is legitimate or not, but a distinction present within this specific cultural context.

gender norms have been reinforced in the cultural context of the ‘war on terror’ and subsequently think differently about gender, agency and political violence. By this I mean we need to focus on *representations* of female agency in political violence because such representations inform us not only how female agency in political violence is understood but also what such understandings might mean for everyday life in our societies. Fourth, related to the focus on representations is the point that while most of the existing literature on female agency in political violence in IR tend to focus on narratives or ‘framing patterns’ (Nacos 2005), I do not distinguish between different forms of representations. Inspired by, and indebted to, contributions such as Der Derian and Shapiro (1989), Bleiker (2001; 2009), Campbell (2003), Weber (2005) and Weldes (1999; 2003b) that have engaged with the cultural and the visual realm, I include visual representations from ‘mass culture’ (Weldes 1999) in my analysis. I do this because culture has to do with how we make sense of the world and how we produce, reproduce and circulate that sense (Weber 2005: 3). Culture is about how meanings are made. Consequently, since meaning construction is not limited to written text, there is no point in restricting analyses of the world in such a way. In this sense, popular culture has just as much to tell us about understandings of gender, agency and political violence as do more traditional sources of data and visual representations are equally important for the construction of meaning and knowledge.

### 3. AIMS

The first of three related aims of this study is to offer a poststructuralist account of gender, agency and political violence. As briefly touched upon above, I do so by analysing

representations of agency, by using a broader definition of political violence as well as of representation, and by exploring what gendered representations mean on a domestic level. The second aim is to demonstrate not only how representations of female agency in political violence are gendered but to show that the same gendered war stories are produced in both mass media and popular culture. The third aim of this research project is to show that motherhood is ‘everywhere’ in representations of female agency in political violence and to demonstrate that motherhood is not just one narrative out of many through which women’s agency in political violence is denied, but motherhood is also about how agency in political violence is enabled. Because motherhood is ‘everywhere’ it is providing the key to understanding how representations of female agency in political violence are gendered. This is why it is useful to think about motherhood as a myth. Accordingly, I introduce the Myth of Motherhood and show how discourses of political violence are not only linked to each other but also constitutive of the myth. In this way, the myth functions as a meta-discourse disciplining representations of female agency in political violence.

These aims, together and separately, make theoretical and methodological contributions to critical IR theory and critical security studies in general and feminist IR in particular. It enriches debates about the interpenetration of popular culture in IR and it enhances poststructuralist accounts of gender, agency and political violence in feminist IR. In order to make such contributions to knowledge, I have constructed an elaborate theoretical and methodological framework influenced and inspired by contributions to cultural studies. While the chosen approach of analysis is original, it also brings challenges and limitations for the research project as a whole. In the last section of my concluding chapter, I re-visit such challenges and critically reflect upon the empirical findings and the conclusions of the research project altogether.

#### 4. EMPIRICAL CASES

This research speaks directly to, and aims to make a contribution to, the feminist IR literature on gender, agency and political violence described in greater detail in Chapter 4. As mentioned above, one of the project's aims is to fill a gap in the existing literature by analysing gender, agency and political violence in non-traditional spaces such as popular culture. For this reason, I have chosen to analyse three 'real' empirical cases and three fictional empirical cases. I put 'real' within citation marks because following my theoretical and methodological framework, I argue that both 'real' and fictional cases are representations of events. They are both part of story-telling.

The cases I have chosen to analyse are Faye Turney, Lynndie England, Janis Karpinski, *Britz* (2007), *Female Agents* (2008) and *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* (2008). First, as mentioned above, Faye Turney was one of fifteen British sailors and marines held captive in Iran for two weeks in the spring of 2007. She was not only the only woman in the group but she was also a mother. The media attention during and after the event was predominantly focused on Turney and her role as a woman/mother. As a result, this is an excellent case for a study of gender, agency and political violence through motherhood. Lynndie England was one of three female US military police officers who got punished for their involvement in the so-called Abu Ghraib prison scandal in 2004. England remains the most famous face associated with the scandal and was by far the most written and published about. The disproportional focus on England, as well as her pregnancy, validates the selection of this case. Janis Karpinski was the US General in charge of all military police officers tasked with prisoner-of-war-operations in Iraq at the time of the Abu Ghraib scandal, including some of the military police officers depicted in the infamous photos. Karpinski was the first female General to command troops in



combat and she remains the only General ever to have been demoted in US military history. Karpinski's unusual high military rank for a woman and even more unusual subsequent demotion is the reason for why I have chosen this case. *Britz* is a Channel 4 television drama in two parts about a British female suicide bomber from 2007. Nasima, the main character, uses motherhood as a tactical strategy as she wears a maternity suit in order to hide explosives. As such, *Britz* offers an excellent account of how gender, agency and political violence is played out through motherhood. *Female Agents* is a French film from 2008 about a group of women who fought as agents for the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) during the Second World War when France was occupied by Germany. *Female Agents* was promoted with the slogan 'heroism is not only for men' and, thereby, it attempts to retrospectively assign heroism to those women who played an active part in the war. Thus, this case is chosen because of its outspoken focus on female heroism. Last, *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* from 2008 tells the story about the German left-wing terrorist organisation Red Army Faction (RAF) and their actions during the 1970s. The RAF, sometimes referred to as the Baader-Meinhof group after Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, included a large number of women in prominent roles. Thus, this case is chosen because of the high visibility of female 'terrorists' and because of the references to a 'war on terror'. A more detailed description of, and the rationale for choosing, each case is provided in Chapter 3. In order to clarify who is who in the empirical analysis in Chapter 5, 6 and 7, there is also an overview of each case and an alphabetical list of all empirical characters presented between Chapter 4 and 5.

## 5. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

In Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical insights that underpin this project: poststructuralism, feminism and myth as inspired by Roland Barthes' work. I conceptualise the Myth of Motherhood as a meta-discourse disciplining representations of female agency in political violence. In Chapter 3, I discuss methodological concepts, including representations and mass culture, which are fundamental to this research project, and I situate these within discourse analysis. I also demonstrate how and why I am conducting a discourse analysis, what I will analyse (visual and textual representations) and where I will look for such representations (mass culture). Here, I also give an extended account for the rationale for choosing the empirical cases included in my analysis and I describe specific methods used to analyse the empirical data.

In Chapter 4, I investigate the existing academic literature on gender, agency and political violence to which this research project aims to make a contribution. In the first section, I examine literature regarding gender and war in a broad sense. I discuss how women have traditionally been positioned in the role of victim, how female agency in war is most often linked to work for peace rather than participation in warfare, and how female heroism traditionally has been linked to motherhood. In the second section, I address literature regarding female perpetrators of political violence more specifically. I explore literature that deals with women's indirect agency in wars and political violence, literature that has shown that female agency is in fact denied, and literature that engages with women's proscribed violence. In the conclusion, I clarify how this research project makes original contributions to the existing literature. It does so in five main ways: by analysing visual representations of female agency in political violence; by using data from popular culture; by using a broader

definition of agency in political violence which encompass both legitimate and illegitimate agency; by arguing that 'motherhood' is useful to think of as a myth, a meta-discourse disciplining representations of female agency in political violence; and by exploring how stories of war, rescue and heroism are used to police gender norms on a domestic level.

Chapter 5-7 are the three empirical chapters. In order to show the complexity of representations of female agency in political violence, I decided to not divide the chapters up based on the different empirical cases. Instead, the discourses constituting the Myth of Motherhood guide the structure and the chapters are divided into three different ways in which the Myth of Motherhood is constituted: as versions, perversions and inversions of Motherhood. This means that it is possible that cases and characters simultaneously appear in all three empirical chapters. In Chapter 5, I show how stories of heroines are ordered by three different discourses: the *Vacant Womb*, the *Protective Mother* and the *Non-Mother*. Here, the female subject is either written as an empty womb, in maternal language or as a masculine subject. Because of the centrality of motherhood/lack of motherhood, I argue that in representations of female agency in political violence heroine stories are all versions of motherhood. This is how the Myth of Motherhood is constantly being reinforced in such stories.

In Chapter 6, I engage with how monsters are constructed and what function they fulfil. I show how stories of monsters are constructed through transgressions of gender boundaries constituting the Myth of Motherhood. These stories of 'unnatural' femininity are influenced by three different discourses: the *Monstrous-Feminine*, the *Deviant Womb* and the *Femme Castratrice*. Due to the close association between 'natural' femininity and motherhood, I argue that these discourses are producing stories of perversions of motherhood as the

monster/subject is disrupting 'natural' femininity. I argue that monster stories serve to highlight the boundary between 'natural' and 'unnatural' femininity in order to emphasise 'natural' femininity. Thus, even though the monster itself is disrupting the idea of 'natural' femininity, what is communicated in these stories overall is still an emphasis on 'natural' femininity which functions to constitute the Myth of Motherhood.

In Chapter 7, I explore stories of victims in representations of female agency in political violence. I argue that discourses of *Vulnerability* and *Emotionality* influence such stories and function to deny the female subject agency in political violence. This takes place as female perpetrators of political violence who are represented as victims are portrayed as less than adult, as childlike, and therefore not deemed capable of raising children of their own. This is how agency is linked to adulthood and this is why I argue that victim stories are about inversions of motherhood. I show how female subjects are either written as vulnerable and passive objects in need of protection or as emotional and, therefore, weak subjects driven by personal motivations. Thus, by writing female agents of political violence as victims, not only is their agency in such violence denied, but because of gendered ideas about women's and men's roles during warfare as explained in Chapter 4, appropriate femininity is also rescued. This is how the Myth of Motherhood is reproduced in victim stories.

In Chapter 8, I draw together the strands of argument developed in the chapters above and reflect on the implications of these findings. In the first section, I restate my argument that representations of female agency in political violence are told as stories of heroines, monsters and victims. Then, I argue that motherhood is not simply a narrative in which women's agency in political violence is denied, but motherhood is 'everywhere' in representations of female agency in political violence. Heroine stories are told as versions of motherhood,

monster stories are told as perversions of motherhood and victim stories are inversions of motherhood. As a result, I make the case for thinking of motherhood as a myth. In the last section, I critically reflect upon strengths and weaknesses of my theoretical and methodological framework and discuss avenues for future research.

## Chapter 2

# **THEORY**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I introduce the Myth of Motherhood as a conceptual fusion of the three main influences of this theoretical framework: poststructuralism, feminism and Roland Barthes' mythology framework. In the first section, I describe poststructuralist thought and discuss concepts relevant to this research project such as discourse, representation and meaning. In the second section, I introduce feminist theorising in general and the compatibility of poststructuralism and feminism in particular before I explain how I use concepts such as gender, sex, heteronormativity, subject and agency. The specific concepts discussed in the sub-sections are chosen not only because they clarify what a poststructuralist account of female agency in political violence entails and what it can offer to the existing literature, but also because these concepts are the foundations of the theoretical framework. As such, they will implicitly inform and guide the structure of the following chapters. In the third section, I introduce Roland Barthes' mythology framework as a theoretical inspiration for this research project. Indebted to the work of Cynthia Weber and Craig Saper, I explain how the mythology framework is compatible with poststructuralist theorising. In the conclusion, I conceptualise the Myth of Motherhood which, I argue, functions as a meta-discourse that both link and

discipline representations of female agency in political violence along essentialist ideas about gender, agency and political violence.

## 2. POSTSTRUCTURALISM

### 2.1 Introducing poststructuralism

Richard Ashley argues that the task of poststructuralist scholarship is to:

[C]ome to terms with the knowledgeable practices by which limits are imposed and paradigmatically inscribed, thus, to enable resistance to those practices, the transgression of those limits, and, with these transgressions, new cultural connections and new modes of political seeing, saying, and being. (Ashley 1989: 284)

Accordingly, it is important to explore what structures and practices are repeated; how modes of order are produced, imposed, problematised and resisted. It is also important to study effects of continuity, effects of social spacing and framing, effects in the administration of social time, as well as to understand the workings of power and power's relation to knowledge (Ashley 1989: 279). In other words, by examining the limits of the present, it is possible to think and move beyond them (Lloyd 2005: 118). Furthermore, poststructuralism is no specific philosophy or a single theoretical framework. Rather, the history of poststructuralism as a form of textual and discursive enquiry has generated diverse, lengthy and competing accounts of itself (Baxter 2003: 21). Still, poststructuralism has a particular interest in language as constructing meaning and knowledge, and in critiquing the ways in

which competing forms of knowledge and the power interests these serve aspire to fix meaning once and for all (Baxter 2003: 23). It is only through the construction in language that ‘things’, objects, subjects, states, living beings and material structures, are given meaning and endowed with a particular identity. This means that language is both social and political. The social aspect means that individuals are socialised into connecting sounds with particular objects and into a larger set of political discourses on, for example, ‘national security’, ‘democracy’, and ‘the rule of law’ (Hansen 2006: 18). Language as political means that discourses themselves are practices that systematically form or create the objects that they speak of. Discourses themselves produce knowledge and meaning (Baxter 2003: 7). Understanding language as a field of social and political practice in this way suggests there is no objective or ‘true meaning’ even though discourses always strive to fix meaning around a closed structure. Instead, truth is understood as an effect of discourses, language and practices:

Truth claims are generated by certain constellations of discourses, practices and institutions and they secure particular effects in the world. They determine whose voice matters in a specific context; they govern what qualifies as legitimate knowledge and what does not; they set the boundaries between ‘truth’ and ‘falsity’. (Lloyd 2005: 125)

Hence, instead of an absolute ‘truth’, multiple, partial, contested and situated ‘truths’ are found (Roseneil 1999: 165). Furthermore, this also means that individuals are never outside of cultural forces or discursive practices, but always ‘subject’ to them. Their identities are determined by a range of ‘subject positions’ (‘ways of being’), approved by their culture and made available to them by means of the particular discourses operating within a given discursive context (Baxter 2003: 25). In other words, language and systems of representation



do not reflect an already existing reality so much as they organise, construct and mediate our understanding of reality, emotion and imagination (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 12-13).

Because meaning is never finally fixed but always being negotiated and inflected to resonate with new situations (Hall 1997: 9), a poststructuralist analysis is not interested in attempting to interpret and fix a meaning central to a particular text or set of practices (Ashley 1989: 278). Instead, poststructuralist theory is generally used in order to understand how meanings are produced rather than explaining why something occurs. According to Roxanne Doty, research projects asking why-questions are incomplete in that they presuppose a particular 'background of social/discursive practices and meanings which make possible the practices as well as the actors themselves' (Doty 1993: 298). Instead, by posing how-questions, poststructuralist research manages to deal with an important aspect of power that why-questions too often neglect. This kind of power is productive of meanings, subject identities, their interrelationships and a range of imaginable conduct (Doty 1993: 299). In this way, what is explained is not *why* a particular outcome happened, but rather *how* the subjects, objects and interpretative dispositions were socially constructed such that certain practices were made possible (Doty 1993: 298). This is how discourses are 'practices of power by which the proliferation of meaning is disciplined and narrative structure is imposed upon history' (Ashley 1989: 282).

Moreover, by re-politicising dominant representations, poststructuralist analyses call attention to the inclusions and exclusions involved in producing that which appears to be natural, fixed and timeless and argue that the political action which follows from naturalised understandings could be pursued differently (Campbell 2007: 225). This is the case because discourses exclude or silence contesting interpretations. In this way, discourses at the same time

construct the meaning, empower and fix the limits of socially recognised modes of objectivity, subjectivity and the conduct that is taken as the natural way of doing things (Ashley 1989: 282). This is how discourses are political practices and, as a result, knowledge is a matter of power and politics. Consequently, by analysing discursive structures of meaning-in-use (Milliken 1999), poststructuralism can offer something more than critique, it can offer a way to think differently about that which is taken for granted. It can critique that which is considered common sense.

## **2.2 Representations: Connecting meaning and language to culture**

In this sub-section, I explain some concepts associated with poststructuralist theorising and crucial to this research project. These concepts give us access to the manifold aspects of power relations which inform representations and, as such, they offer insights into how meanings are made and communicated. In other words, these concepts clarify how I conduct a poststructuralist study.

From a poststructuralist perspective, there is no ‘extra-discursive’ materiality that is independent of its discursive representation (Hansen 2006: 25). However, this insight has been critiqued for denying reality as the argument has sometimes been misinterpreted from Foucault’s insight that ‘nothing has any meaning outside of discourse’ to ‘there is nothing outside of discourse’ (Hall 1997: 44-5). Hence, poststructuralist theorising does not deny that things can have a real, material existence in the world. In fact, discourse incorporates material as well as ideational factors (Hansen 2006: 17).

Elements such as sounds, words, gestures, expressions, clothes are part of our natural and material world but their importance for language is not what they *are* but what they *do*, their function. They construct meaning and transmit it. They signify. They do not have any clear meaning in *themselves*. (Hall 1997: 5, emphasis in original.)

In other words, the concept of discourse is not about whether things exist but about where meaning comes from (Hall 1997: 45). The point is not to disregard material facts but to study how these are produced and prioritised (Hansen 2006: 22). In Judith Butler's words:

Language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e., reduced to one another, and yet neither fully ever exceeds the other. Always already implicated in each other, always already exceeding one another, language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different. (Butler 1993: 69)

I use discourse as 'structures of meaning-in-use' (Milliken 1999: 231) and culture as 'shared meanings' (Hall 1997: 1). Meanings regulate and organise our conduct and practices because they help to set the rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed (Hall 1997: 4). Practices of representation, therefore, are the embodying of concepts, ideas and emotions in a symbolic form which can be transmitted and meaningfully interpreted (Hall 1997: 10). In this way, representation is the link between concepts and language that enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events (Hall 1997: 17). However, representation works as much through what is shown as through what is not which means that meanings created do not reflect an already existing reality so much as they organise, construct and mediate our understanding or imagination of it (Hall 1997: 59; Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 13). In this sense, representation connects meaning and language to culture and it is only through the

process of representation that political reality comes into being (Bleiker 2001: 512). We give meaning by how we represent something, the words we use, the images we produce, the emotions we associate with, the ways we classify and conceptualise and the values we ascribe it (Hall 1997: 3). Thus, through language, representation is central to the processes by which meaning, but also culture, is produced (Hall 1997: 1). This is why cultural practices are also political practices and representation is always an act of power (Bleiker 2001: 515).

### 3. FEMINISM

#### **3.1 Introducing poststructuralist feminism**

Feminism is a broad, varied and interdisciplinary theoretical perspective and there are by necessity many feminisms. Feminism is ‘a field of critical practices that cannot be totalized’ (Butler and Scott 1992: xiii) and an insistent practice of critique rejecting what is unsatisfactory in the present (Lloyd 2005: 111). Since the 1980s, feminist scholarship has influenced the academic discipline of IR, which for some seventy years of its history was thought to be gender-neutral (Enloe 1989). Feminist insights have shown that both IR and international politics which provide IR’s rationale are already gendered. In fact, gender is constitutive of both international politics and the discipline (Pettman 2004: 85). Contributions from prominent scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, J. Ann Tickner, Spike Peterson, Christine Sylvester, Marysia Zalewski and Cynthia Weber have transformed not only the academic

discipline of IR but also the debate regarding what counts as politics.<sup>3</sup> Because of the scope of this research project, here, I focus on explaining poststructuralist feminism as the two main components, poststructuralism and feminism, have been seen to constitute a ‘contradiction in terms’ (Baxter 2003: 2).

The alleged tension within poststructuralist feminism involves the poststructuralist insight that there is no singular feminine subject or feminist approach and, as a result, the category of ‘woman’ can never be fixed. For this reason, poststructuralism has been critiqued for taking the ‘heat off patriarchy’ and seen as a ‘refusal to engage with grand structures of oppression’ such as identify male domination as the rival challenge for feminism (Roseneil 1999). Some feminists argued that poststructuralist feminism is incapable of being truly critical because it is descriptive rather than explanatory and can therefore not lead to social transformation (Lloyd 2005: 111). There was a concern that a feminist theory ‘cannot proceed without presuming the materiality of women’s bodies, the materiality of sex’ (Butler 1992: 17) and the question of whether feminist politics require, as their foundation, the existence of the stable category of ‘woman’ has, thus, been widely debated (Roseneil 1999: 163).<sup>4</sup> In this sense, poststructuralist feminism was seen as undermining the feminist commitment to women’s agency and, thus, not compatible with a commitment to feminist politics (Shepherd 2008: 4; Dietz 2003: 413). The emancipatory stance of feminism and the deconstructive purpose of poststructuralism seemed to constitute ‘a contradiction in terms’ (Baxter 2003: 2). As a result, some feminists (the author included) reject the idea of truth as a metaphysical reality whereas other feminists hold onto truth as the ground of feminism (Lloyd 2005: 121). Next, I show

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Enloe (2000), Tickner (1992), Peterson (1992), Sylvester (2002), Zalewski (1995), Weber (2005).

<sup>4</sup> See Dietz (2003) and Squires (1999) for a more detailed overview of how various strands of feminism differ. See Zalewski (2000) for an exploration of differences and similarities between modernist and postmodernist feminisms.

how the combination of poststructuralism and feminism instead of constituting a contradiction is not only a highly compatible combination, but also offer new ways of thinking to identified political puzzles.

According to Baxter, three of the most significant principles of poststructuralism that relate to feminism are, firstly, a scepticism towards universal causes and ‘grand narratives’, secondly, the contestation of meaning and, last, the discursive construction of subjectivity (Baxter 2003: 22). The insight that there is no single discourse that produces woman, but practices, institutions and discourses together produce the social category of woman also means that females always adopt multiple subject positions. Within certain subject positions, females may be powerful whereas in other subject positions they can be distinctly powerless (Baxter 2003: 10; Lloyd 2005: 19).

To understand ‘women’ as a permanent site of contest, or as a feminist site of agonistic struggle, is to presume that there can be no closure on the category and that, for politically significant reasons, there ought never to be. That the category can never be descriptive is the very condition of its political efficiency. (Butler 1993: 221)

In other words, the subject position of woman is never fixed by the signifier ‘woman’ as that term does not describe a pre-existing constituency, but is rather, part of the very production and formulation of that constituency, one that is perpetually renegotiated and rearticulated in relation to other signifiers within the political field (Butler 1993: 195). This does not mean that poststructuralist feminism denies materiality in women’s lived, embodied reality and subjective experiences. On the contrary, the ways in which individuals make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding the ways in which gendered discourses continue to structure social relations (Baxter 2003: 30). As Butler explains:

The debate between constructivism and essentialism misses the point of deconstruction altogether, for the point has never been that 'everything is discursively constructed'; that point, when and where it is made, belongs to a kind of discursive monism or linguisticism that refuses the constitutive force of exclusion, erasure, violent foreclosure, abjection and its disruptive return within the very terms of discursive legitimacy. (Butler 1993: 8)

Moreover, much of the critique of feminism's involvement with poststructuralism, as Baxter has shown, is actually based in modernist beliefs:

There could be no obvious partnership between modernist feminism and poststructuralism, at least as it is conceived by male theorists such as Foucault and Derrida. There are theoretical contradictions in terms of the conception of the role of emancipatory causes, the individual's place in the world and the relationship between language and meaning. (Baxter 2003: 28)

In this way, the supposed 'contradiction in terms' in the merging of poststructuralist thought and feminism is a 'productive contradiction' for discourse analysis, able to challenge old assumptions and invite the possibility of fresh readings, keener insights and changes in practice (Baxter 2003: 2). What poststructuralist feminism does is putting essentialist identities such as 'woman' into question which opens up deeper issues for research such as how 'woman' is constructed as a category within different discourses, how sexual difference is made a significant distinction in social relations and how relations of subordination are constructed through such a distinction (Mouffe 1992: 373). In this sense, poststructuralist feminism shows how 'woman', as an effect of discourse, language and power, 'get said' (Zalewski 2000: 69), but can also abandon the idea of 'woman' as the centre of feminist practice and ask what then might become the subject of feminism (Lloyd 2005: 14).

Poststructuralist feminism does not share the feminist quest to expose the gendered nature of society or the structural inequalities it produces because it appreciates the unevenness and ambiguities of power relations between males and females but, more importantly, because ‘the theories of females as universal victims of patriarchy no longer do’ (Baxter 2003: 31). In the next sub-section, I disentangle the apparent tension inherent within poststructuralist feminism further by discussing concepts such as gender/sex, heteronormativity, subject and agency in greater detail.

### **3.2 Gender/sex, heteronormativity, subject and agency**

Here, I explain how I use the concepts of gender/sex, heteronormativity, subject and agency in order to demonstrate that the tension within poststructuralist feminism is false and to show how a poststructuralist feminist perspective offers something different. First, the attention to the issue of gender/sex has been one of the defining features of feminist scholarship (Cooke 1996: 14). Feminist scholars challenged the assumed notion that differences between men and women are given by nature. Instead, they argued, these differences between male and female are socially and culturally constructed (Lloyd 2005: 133). Gender, thus, has been seen as a set of discourses which can set, change, enforce and represent meaning on the basis of perceived membership in relation to sex categories (Sjoberg 2007: 6). Traditionally, the concept of gender has been referred to as the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ as social classifications as opposed to sex, which denotes the physiological distinction between males and females. To think about gender is to think about beliefs about sexual differences, despite their social character (Parpart and Zalewski 2008: iix). Crucially, gender is not synonymous with women and feminine identities, but also about men and masculine identities and, more importantly,



about relations between men and women (Tickner 2002: 336). Marysia Zalewski argues that even though the contents of the categories of masculinities and femininities change across time and cultures, there appears to be a constant relationship between ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ characterised by two factors. Firstly, that they are not independent categories but are defined in oppositional relation to each other (to be feminine is to be not masculine), and, secondly, that that which is associated with masculinity tends to have a greater value than that associated with femininity (Zalewski 1995: 341). Hence, gender subordination is defined as the subordination of femininities to masculinities and remains a constant feature of social and political life across time and space (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 6).

From a poststructuralist perspective, however, the separation between the biological and the social becomes blurred as the category of sex in itself is seen as a construction. Judith Butler’s influential work has critiqued the nature of this gender/sex relation as a simple conception where gender gains its specificity through its opposition to sex, conceived as a biological fact. Butler recognises how gender and biological sex, in order to acquire their oppositional value, relied on each other for existence:

The relation between culture and nature presupposed by some model of gender ‘construction’ implies a culture or an agency of the social which acts upon nature, which is itself presupposed as a passive surface, outside the social and yet its necessary counterpart. (Butler 1993: 4)

Building on Michel Foucault, Butler argues that sex is from the start normative. In this sense, sex not only functions as a norm but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, the bodies it controls (Butler 1993: 1). In this way, Butler challenges how materiality of ‘sex’ has become a sign of irreducibility, that is, how materiality of sex is ‘understood as

that which only ears cultural constructions and, therefore, cannot be a construction itself' (Butler 1993: 28). This, to Butler, is a failure to historicise sex: sex is assumed to be natural and immutable, without history. If, however, sex is a historical construction, then it cannot be categorically distinguished from gender for both are cultural. This means that it cannot be conceived as the pre-discursive surface upon which gender writes, because there are no pre-discursive, prior, or 'natural' sites or foundations for either sex or gender on which to rest identity. Sexual difference, despite often being invoked as an issue of material differences, is never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices (Butler 1993: 1). The point is not to deny physical differences between men and women as biological animals. Butler does not dispute the materiality of the body as 'the body is not simply linguistic stuff or that it has no bearing on language: it bears on language all the time' (Butler 1993: 68). On the contrary, Butler shows the normative conditions under which the materiality of the body is framed and formed, and, in particular, how it is formed through differential categories of sex (Butler 1992: 17).

To deconstruct the concept of matter or that of bodies is not to negate or refuse either term. To deconstruct these terms means, rather, to continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power. (Butler 1992: 17)

In this way, Butler proposes a return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter. Thus, instead of asking how 'gender is constituted as and through a certain interpretation of sex', which leaves the 'matter' of sex untheorised, Butler asks 'through what regulatory norms is sex itself materialised' and how it is that 'treating the materiality of sex as a given presupposes and consolidates the normative conditions of its own

emergence' (Butler 1993: 9-10). In effect, sex is as culturally constructed as gender and, therefore, sex is itself a 'gendered category' (Butler 2006: 5). Sex is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialised through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialise sex and achieve this materialisation through a forcible reiteration of those norms (Butler 1993: 1).

Butler critiques feminists who tend to hold onto the idea of a binary gender system. This incorporates the idea that there is a direct mapping between sex and gender such that femininity is connected to the female body and masculinity to the male (Lloyd 2005: 134). However, as Butler's research clearly shows, there are biological sexes that cannot be understood as either male or female, such as inter-/transsexuals, and there could potentially be more genders than sexes, such as asexuals or people in drag. Moreover, there is no guarantee that biological sexual difference (absence/presence of body part or other physiological characteristics) should align itself with cultural sexual difference (active/passive, public/private and so on) or with the logical sexual difference (pure signifier/real) under the banner male/female (or man/woman, masculine/feminine) (Glynos 2000: 215). Masculinity could easily accrue to female bodies and vice versa (Lloyd 2005: 134). However, the political regulations and disciplinary practices that produce gender (as heterosexual difference) can be 'displaced from view' through the 'play of signifying absences' that are sustained through 'corporeal signs and other discursive means' (Butler 2006: 136). With this, Butler argues that gender is 'performative' (Butler 2006: 139). Butler asserts that a performative is 'that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names' (Butler 1993: 13; Lloyd 2005: 25). This takes place through subversive speech acts of parody, repetition, and recitation as, for example, in the cultural practices of 'drag', cross-dressing, and the 'sexual stylisation of butch/femme identities' (Butler 2006: 137). To claim that discourse is performative is not to

claim that it originates causes or exhaustively composes that which it concedes. Rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. In this sense, the linguistic capacity to refer to sexed bodies is not denied, but the very meaning of 'referentiality' is altered (Butler 1993: 10-11). Butler contends that gender is not an expression of what one *is*; it is something that one *does* (Lloyd 2005: 25). Sexing the subject is the effect of the reiteration of a set of inescapable norms (Lloyd 2005: 26). Butler notes that it is the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains (Butler 1993: 2). However, crucially, sexed bodies and gendered subjects are not produced through a single act of constitution but only through repetition (Lloyd 2005: 26). Gender identity can never be achieved once-and-for-all. Butler rejects the idea of gender as performance where this assumes the existence of a prior subject. Performing (doing) gender is neither an expression of a subject's will or the revelation of some gendered truth about them (Lloyd 2005: 138). Furthermore, since gender is cultural, it also varies across time and across societies and is cut across by considerations of class, race, age, and so forth. Therefore, there is no direct link back to the sexed body but gender identities are, at best, naturalised fictions (rather than natural entities) always prone to dissonance and uncertainty (Lloyd 2005: 133). Acknowledging this fictiveness enables gender to be de-coupled from sex. Once gender roles are recognised as 'designated', not natural, any necessary link between women and femininity is broken (Lloyd 2005: 21). This is how poststructuralist insights regarding gender and sex enable a critique of 'natural' femininity and, subsequently, of essentialist ideas about gender, agency and political violence.

Second, another concept linked to ideas about gender/sex and poststructuralist theorising, and useful to this research project, is heteronormativity. The concept is commonly referred to as the normative power of heterosexuality present in both society and politics (Chambers and

Carver 2008: 121). It is argued that the cultural apparatus of gender produces binary sex in a way that normalises certain bodies, genders and sexualities and pathologises others (Lloyd 2005: 134). Butler argues that gender is inflected with power and regulated through the institution of 'a compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality' under the hierarchical and oppressive binary relation of masculine/feminine (Butler 2006: 22-23). Gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones that are almost always related to the idealisation of the heterosexual bond (Butler 1993: 231). Heteronormativity in this way constructs heterosexual practices as 'normal' or 'natural', but, at the same time, it also draws attention to those deviant, abjected or marginalised individuals who are discriminated against by the dominant sexual norm (Chambers and Carver 2008: 121). I use the concept of heteronormativity in order to highlight and critique 'natural' femininity and its association with motherhood; how motherhood functions as a symbol of heteronormativity.

Third, the assumption that feminism requires a stable, coherent subject in order to justify and ground its politics and to challenge the oppressive structures confining women, relies on essentialist claims and, thus, sets a limit to how feminism conceives politics and disguises the power relations that underpin this conception (Lloyd 2005: 3). From a poststructuralist perspective, the subject is produced within discourse and cannot be outside of it because it must be subjected to it. The subject must submit to the discourse's rules and conventions, to its dispositions of power/knowledge (Hall 1997: 55). The critique of the feminist subject is not a negation or repudiation of the subject, but, rather, a way of interrogating its construction as a pre-given or foundationalist premise (Butler 1992: 9). Deconstruction only implies that we suspend all commitments to that to which the subject refers and that we consider the linguistic functions it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority. To deconstruct

is not to negate or to dismiss, but to call into question and, perhaps most importantly, to open up a term, like the subject, to a re-usage or redeployment that previously has not been authorised (Butler 1992: 15). To argue that the subject is constituted is to disclaim the idea that there is anything pre-discursively natural about that subject (Lloyd 2005: 41).

All discourses construct subject positions, a place for the subject. This suggests that discourses themselves construct the subject positions from which they become meaningful and have effects. Every subject is a fluid, multiple subject (Lloyd 2005: 55). Lloyd adopts the idea of a subject-in-process, a subject that has no essential nature but is constituted in various, always incomplete ways (Lloyd 2005: 14). Particular attributes of subjects (or subject positions) may appear natural, but in reality these meanings are always already social. Their appearance as natural is the result of certain processes that attempt to make certain ideas seem commonsensical (Lloyd 2005: 20).

Every identity (essential or historical) is performatively produced and at the same time each performative production involves positing a constative claim. Each time, that is, feminists appeal to the idea of women they performatively invoke her, but each performative invocation produces her anew and differently. (Lloyd 2005: 51)

Another way in which to demonstrate that there is no tension within poststructuralist feminism and to show how I define agency is to discuss the distinction between subject positions and political subjectivity. First, the concept of subject positions accounts for the multiple forms through which agents are produced as social actors (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 12). Subject positions are used to capture the positioning of subjects within a discursive structure, intelligible only with reference to a specific set of categories, concepts and practices (Doty 1993: 303, 309). This means that, rather than a homogenous subject with particular

interests, an individual can have multiple subject positions (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 13). Similarly, there might be multiple physical individuals that constitute a single subject (Doty 1993: 309). Thus, subject positions should not be confused with individuals. The concept of political subjectivity on the other hand is commonly used to account for the agency of subjects. It concerns the way in which social actors *act* (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 12, 13). Hence, by analysing subject positions rather than political subjectivity, this research project investigates how a female subject is written in a particular discourse rather than how individual women act, which most of the existing literature on female agency in political violence tend to do as explained in Chapter 4. This is one way in which this research project offers a poststructuralist feminist account of female agency in political violence.

Related to this, another way in which this research project constitutes a poststructuralist account of female agency in political violence concerns the definition of agency. Here, I analyse representations of agency rather than ‘real’ agency and, as mentioned above, through subject positions rather than political subjectivity. I follow Butler who argues that agency is not related to a theory of the self but is an effect of the operations of discourse-power through which subjects are produced. According to Butler, agency traditionally belongs to a way of thinking about persons as instrumental actors who confront an external political field. But, she argues, politics and power exist already at the level at which the subject and its agency are articulated and made possible, therefore, agency can be presumed only at the cost of refusing to inquire into its construction (Butler 1992: 13). This is why agency cannot be separated from context (Lloyd 2005: 108) and this is why, in the analysis of agency, representations need to be broadly defined, including both the visual realm and cultural artefacts. To clarify, I define agency as representations of agency. I analyse how agency is represented through discourses which produce subjects. In order to understand how representations of gender and

agency are interpreted as common sense, it is now time to consider how myths construct meanings.

## 4. MYTH

### 4.1 Roland Barthes and mythology

What if Barthes began over again and rewrote his mythological investigations after the later works? (Saper 1997: 13)

In order to conceptualise the Myth of Motherhood as a meta-discourse influencing representations of female agency in political violence in mass culture, I build on Roland Barthes' theorising of myth. Barthes' insights are instrumental to this research project as he draws attention to construction of myths in popular culture and through visual imagery, which is relevant to the empirical cases included in this study. In fact, his essay collection *Mythologies*, initially published in 1957, is considered one of the founding texts of cultural studies (Storey 1993: 82). However, while Barthes, through his later works, is seen as a key figure within early poststructuralist theorising, his work on myth construction was produced at an earlier stage of his career when he was heavily influenced by structuralist linguistics for his narrative analysis. The earlier work sought to uncover, to expose, the singular meaning from a multitude of situations (Saper 1997: 13) and the 'ideological abuse' hidden in myths (Weber 2005: 10). *Mythologies* concludes with a theoretical essay, 'Myth today', in which Barthes outlines semiology as a methodology for exploring the ideological function of myths and the reading of popular culture (Weber 2005: 10). The methodological quest to expose the 'true' hidden meaning through representations is not compatible with poststructuralism's reflexive



approach as poststructuralism rejects the idea of an underlying structure upon which meaning can rest 'secure and satisfied' (Storey 1993: 89). For this reason, most poststructuralists influenced by Barthes tend to build on his later writings.<sup>5</sup>

In this section, I first explain the mythology framework in greater detail with this caveat in mind and, then, in the following sub-section I explain how I integrate Barthes' work on myth with poststructuralist theorising. Indebted to the work of Cynthia Weber (2005) and Craig Saper (1997), this effectively means that I read Barthes' theorising of myth through his later writings. I see Barthes' theorising of myths as work in progress and merely use his works on myth construction as theoretical inspiration, but, crucially, instead of following his methodological approach, I combine his theorisation of myth with a poststructuralist discourse analysis. This is how a 'postmodernised Barthes' (Weber 2005: 10) informs this research project.

Barthes' mythology framework was an attempt to address the fact that semiotics, which draws on linguistics as a way to analyse signs, had been critiqued for ignoring social, political and historical factors and lacking ideology (Hall 1997). To Barthes, there are two semiological systems: a linguistic system, the language (or the modes of representation which are assimilated to it), which Barthes calls the language-object, and the myth itself, which he refers to as meta-language. The theory works in such a way that it is the first language which myth gets hold of in order to build its own system. In this way, the mythical speech, or meta-language, is a second language in which one speaks about the first (Barthes 1993: 100):

Mythical speech is made of a material which has already been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a

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<sup>5</sup> See for example the edited collection by Der Derian and Shapiro (1989).

signifying consciousness that one can reason about them while discounting their substance. (Barthes 1993: 95)

Myth, in this sense, is a double system: 'its point of departure is constituted by the arrival of a meaning' (Barthes 1993: 109). More specifically, mythical speech contains a three-dimensional pattern of the signifier, the signified and the sign. First, the signifier can be looked at from two points of view: as the final term of the linguistic system, or as the first term of the mythical system. As the final term of the linguistic system, the language-object, Barthes calls the signifier 'meaning' and as the first term of the mythical system, Barthes calls it 'form' (Barthes 1993: 102). Moreover, of the signifier's two aspects, meaning is full and form is empty:

The meaning is always there to present the form; the form is always there to outdistance the meaning. And there never is any contradiction, conflict, or split between the meaning and the form: they are never at the same place. (Barthes 1993: 110)

Second, the signified is simply the concept, which unlike the form, is in no way abstract: it is filled with a situation. In the mythical concept, a signified can have an unlimited mass of signifiers, for example countless images (signifiers) can signify the concept of 'poverty'. In this way, the concept is a kind of condensation of certain knowledge (Barthes 1993: 108). Quantitatively, the concept is much poorer than the signifier, it often does nothing but represent itself (Barthes 1993: 105). Moreover, the concept can spread over a very large breadth of signifier. For instance, a whole book may be the signifier of a single concept. Conversely, a 'minute form' (a word, a gesture, as long it is noticed) can serve as a signifier to a concept filled with a very rich history (Barthes 1993: 106). The concept is a constituting element of myth which distorts the full signifier, the meaning of the signifier (Barthes 1993: 108).

Last, the third term is the sign, which it is called in the linguistic system. However, because, in myth, the signifier is already formed by the signs of language, (as the mythical speech builds on the linguistic speech), Barthes calls the third term of myth 'the signification'. The signification, which actually is the myth itself (Barthes 1993: 107), has a double function: 'it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us' (Barthes 1993: 102). The third term is in fact an association of the first two. In this way, the myth is composed of the signifier, a sound, written word, or image, and the signified, which is the concept evoked by that word/image (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 29). The characteristic of myth, then, is to transform a meaning into form. In other words, myth is always a 'language robbery' (Barthes 1993: 118).

According to Barthes, myth is a type of speech, a system of communication, a message. But it is also a value, a language which does not want to die (Barthes 1993: 110, 120). Furthermore, myth is by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of writing or of representations; both written and pictorial discourse, all of which can serve as a support to mythical speech (Barthes 1993: 94). Pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful:

We shall therefore take language, discourse, speech, etc., to mean any significant unit or synthesis, whether verbal or visual: a photograph will be a kind of speech for us in the same way as a newspaper article; even objects will become speech, if they mean something. (Barthes 1993: 95)

This is why there is no need to separate between writing and pictures. They are both signs and they both reach the threshold of myth endowed with the same signifying function. They constitute one just as much as the other, a language-object (Barthes 1993: 100). As I will

come back to in Chapter 3, this resonates well with the inclusion of visual and cultural representations from mass culture for the empirical analysis of this project.

The essential function of myth is the naturalisation of the concept (Barthes 1993: 118). In this sense, myth transforms what is particular, cultural and ideological into what appears to be universal, natural and purely empirical. It is naturalising meanings, making them into common sense, which are the products of cultural practices. The myth function is making a fact out of an interpretation (Weber 2005: 7).

Myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made [...] A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with Nature [...] The function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short, a perceptible absence. (Barthes 1993: 131)

According to Barthes, what allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that s/he does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive one. The signifier and the signified have an apparently natural relationship. This confusion can be expressed otherwise: any semiological system is a system of values but the myth consumer takes the signification for a system of facts. This means that the myth is read as a factual system, when it is only a semiological system (Barthes 1993: 118). According to Barthes, this is why myth is experienced as innocent speech. It is because intentions are naturalised, not because its intentions are hidden. Barthes also refers to myth as depoliticised speech (Barthes 1993: 118). Myth does not deny things. On the contrary, its function is to talk about them. Simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent. It gives them a natural and eternal justification. Myth gives things a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact:

If I *state the fact* of French imperialism without explaining it, I am very near to finding that it is natural and *goes without saying*: I am reassured. (Barthes 1993: 132, emphasis in original)

As mentioned above, Barthes' mythology framework is part of his early theorising and, as such, more heavily structuralist than his later works. Thus, in order to make it apparent how it is compatible with poststructuralist research, in the next section I discuss differences between semiotic and discursive approaches, I build on Cynthia Weber's and Craig Saper's understanding of a postmodernised Barthes, but I also emphasise how I only use Barthes' work on myths as theoretical inspiration rather than as methodology.

#### **4.2 Integrating myth with poststructuralism**

As mentioned above, it was Barthes' later work that explored more complex ways of thinking about how meanings are pluralised through reading and writing and as such more compatible with poststructuralist theorising (Weber 2005: 10). Here, I demonstrate three main ways in which the tension between a structural analysis prevalent in 'Myth Today' and a poststructuralist research agenda can be overcome. This concerns 'postmodernising' Barthes by reading his work on myth through his later works, moreover, it has to do with power and how myth is political, and it means that the methodology of denotation and connotation as described in 'Myth Today' needs to be set aside for a poststructuralist discourse analysis.

First, in order to 'postmodernise' Barthes, I build on Craig Saper's (1997) and Cynthia Weber's (2005) reading of Barthes' work. Saper simply asks what we can learn about mythology from the *later* works (Saper 1997: 6):

Interpreting his later experiments in terms of his earliest works on myth depends on a speculation that takes the form of a question: What if Roland Barthes had lived longer? What if he had continued to write after the later works, the works that broke emphatically with earlier semiotic concerns, in order to introduce paradoxical arguments and experimental presentations? What if Barthes had returned to earlier concerns with his new attitude and methodologies? (Saper 1997: 5)

The background to this speculation is that Roland Barthes died prematurely in a traffic accident in Paris in 1980 and his work can therefore be considered ‘unfinished’. Saper argues that while the earlier work sought to uncover the singular meaning from a multitude of situations, the later work sought ‘polysemy from even the apparently most trivial details’ (Saper 1997: 13). Most critics also agree that, with regards to his writing style, his later work abandoned didactic explanations and traditional structural analyses in favour of reflective essayistic texts that seemed to critique structuralism. In addition, Saper notes, Barthes’ own remarks about his earlier works suggest that he rejected the unsophisticated methods and concerns of the earlier work (Saper 1997: 13).

Reading and interpreting Barthes’ early work on myths through the lens of his later writings produces a postmodernised Barthes. Hence, it is a postmodernised Barthes who informs my reading of myth in this research project. In order to illustrate this, I now turn to the idea of power and how myths are political in order to demonstrate how mythology can be compatible with a poststructuralist discourse analysis.

According to Stuart Hall, one important difference between semiotic and discursive approaches is that the semiotic approach is concerned with the how of representation, with how language produces meaning; whereas the discursive approach is more concerned with the effects and consequences of representation- its ‘politics’ (Hall 1997: 6). In this sense, a

semiological approach is assumed to be apolitical. Barthes' myth framework, however, is implicitly political which distinguishes it from semiotics. The mythical signification is never random; it is always in part motivated, and unavoidably contains some analogy (Barthes 1993: 112). Myth plays on the analogy between meaning and form. There is no myth without motivated form (Barthes 1993: 113). Moreover, Cynthia Weber suggests that the process of transforming the cultural into the natural is a highly political practice that depends on all sorts of complex configurations of power. In a general sense, power works through myths by appearing to take the political out of the ideological. This is because something that appears to be natural and unalterable also appears to be apolitical. Yet, to Weber, such 'natural facts' are the most intensely political stories of all, not just because of what they say (what the specific myth is) but because of what they do (they remove themselves and the tradition they support from political debate) (Weber 2005: 7). In Barthes' words: 'Men do not have with myth a relationship based on truth but on use; they depoliticise according to their needs' (Barthes 1993: 133). Hence, the overtly political character of Barthes' mythology framework shares a common ground with poststructuralist discourse analysis because it explores the concept of power.

Another way in which to demonstrate how myths are political is to discuss the concept of ideologies. Ideologies are usually seen as systems of belief that exist within all cultures; as a 'world view', a more or less coherent system of beliefs, used to make judgements about society (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 21). To Barthes, mythology is a part both of semiology and ideology as it studies ideas-in-form; politics is already a representation, a fragment of ideology (Barthes 1993: 115, 127). As part of a postmodernised reading of Barthes, Cynthia Weber discusses the concept of 'unconscious ideology', which is ideology that is not formally named and that is therefore difficult to identify. It is the common sense foundation of our

world views that is beyond debate (Weber 2005: 5). Weber argues that we use ‘unconscious ideologies’ to help make sense of our worlds, very often without realising it. And because we do not realise we hold unconscious ideologies or use them to make sense of our worlds, we very rarely interrogate them. We rarely ask difficult questions about them that might upset them as common sense (Weber 2005: 5). In this way, we tend not to notice the ideological construction of our world is because ideology denies itself as an ideology. Ideology appears to be reality because it conceals its own construction (Lacey 1998: 101). This is the content of a myth.

The main way in which I integrate Barthes’ work on myths with poststructuralism, however, has to do with methodology. Barthes suggests that in order to ‘gauge the political load of an object and the mythical hollow which espouses it’, one must never look at things from the point of view of the signification, but from that of the signifier, of the thing which has been robbed; and within the signifier, from the point of view of the language-object, that is, of the meaning (Barthes 1993: 133). Hence, one should focus on the mythical signifier as a whole, made of meaning and form. In this way, the researcher consumes the myth according to the very ends built into its structure: the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal (Barthes 1993: 106). According to Barthes’ methodology in ‘Myth Today’, the deconstruction or reading of the myth takes place in two stages, first, denotation in which each of the signifiers of an image is decoded into a simple concept, and, then, connotation, where the concept yields a second and more elaborate and ideologically framed cultural meaning (Barthes 2000: 115). However, for the poststructuralist Barthes, denotation is no longer a neutral level. Instead, denotation itself is a part of the production of myth. Denotation is just as ideological as connotation (Storey 1993: 89). As part of my reading of a postmodernised Barthes, I do not follow his methodological framework of denotation ad



connotation as published in 'Myth Today' because, as explained above, this is incompatible with poststructuralism. Instead, I use his work on myths as theoretical inspiration and combine it with textual and visual methods associated with poststructuralist theorising and discourse analysis.

Barthes' theorising of myths and his conceptualisation of 'text' as meaning-making offers 'a way of seeing language and text that enables citizens to grasp, and contest when need be, the covert structuring of their political thinking' (Fortin 1989: 192). Thus, despite its reliance on structuralist linguistics as part of its methodology, Barthes' theorising of myths is a highly valuable source of inspiration regarding boundaries of what counts as text, what counts as political and the inclusion of popular culture in the analysis of the political. By combining the theorisation of myth with a poststructuralist feminist methodology, a postmodernised Barthes informs this research project and the inherent tension between structuralist semiotics and poststructuralist discourse analysis is overcome.

## 5. CONCLUSION: Introducing the Myth of Motherhood

In this concluding section, I introduce the Myth of Motherhood by building on poststructuralist feminist theorising and Barthes' idea of myth as explained above. The conceptualisation of the Myth of Motherhood is one of this research project's main original contributions to knowledge as I argue that the Myth of Motherhood disciplines representations of female agency in political violence along essentialist ideas about gender, agency and political violence within a Western 'war on terror' culture. In Chapter 5-7, I

illustrate this argument further, but here it is sufficient to show how thinking about motherhood as a myth is part of a poststructuralist account of female agency in political violence.

I use the concept of myths as culturally relative formations of meaning. Thus, a myth cannot per definition be said to be universal; it will not resonate similarly in all cultures. Because of this, the arguments I make can only be made valid with reference to a specific culture in a specific time, the culture in which I live and have access to. Furthermore, I see myth as a set of discursive practices. The relationship between myth and discourse can therefore be described as one of ‘meta-discourse’ and discourse. In this sense, the myth functions as an overarching ‘umbrella’ entailing multiple discourses that are culturally specific. In my case, these discourses concern the subject of female and ideas about motherhood.

The content of what I call the Myth of Motherhood is that ‘unconscious’ ideologies write motherhood as natural, something we do not question, when it is in fact not natural but a social and cultural construction. Crucially, my definition of ‘motherhood’ does not necessarily involve actual mothers or pregnant women, although such representations are more noticeable, but ideas about female bodies and the boundary between ‘natural’/‘unnatural’ femininity through the association of female bodies with motherhood. It is about the *capacity* of female bodies to give life. Because of the writing of ‘motherhood’ as natural rather than constructed, representations of female agency in political violence include negotiations over boundaries of ‘natural’/‘unnatural’ femininity. There is a tension between female bodies’ capacities to give life (Myth of Motherhood) and female bodies’ capacities to take life (agency in political violence). The tension seems to indicate that because of women’s assumed capacity to give life, they cannot ‘naturally’ take life. Seemingly, motherhood, with

which women are ‘naturally’ associated, and killing, is juxtaposed. In this sense, killing is the most ‘unnatural’ feminine behaviour. This tension is not only a way in which the Myth of Motherhood is made visible but it also shows how female agents of political violence have multiple subject positions in various discursive practices. Consequently, it is representations of this tension which is the focus for my analysis.

As mentioned above, myths are culturally relative productions of meaning. This does not only mean that myths might materialise differently in different cultural settings, but also that a myth can never be filled with one example. Although the arguments I make here could potentially be applied elsewhere, the scope of this research project is limited to understandings of female agency in political violence in a cultural context where the issue of terrorism was brought to the forefront of Western security thinking and resulted in the declaration of a global ‘war on terror’ by the George W. Bush administration (Bush 2001).

As I argue below, the Myth of Motherhood materialises as versions, perversions and inversions of motherhood in representations of female agency in political violence through stories of heroines, monsters and victims. The Myth of Motherhood, however, also speaks to other myths of motherhood, for example, within nationalist discourses. See Chapter 4, the literature review, and the empirical chapters for a more detailed discussion on how my conceptualisation of the Myth of Motherhood differs from feminist contributions to a ‘maternal thinking’ and the literature on agency and maternalism.

## Chapter 3

# **METHODOLOGY**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Without theory there is nothing but description, and without methodology there is no transformation of theory into analysis.  
(Hansen 2006: 1)

[T]heory is a method to expose the process of knowledge-making.  
(Zalewski 2000: 73)

In this chapter, I discuss methodological implications of the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. First, I show how and why I use discourse analysis, what I analyse (visual and textual representations) and where I look for such representations (mass culture). I explain why there is a need for analysing textual and visual representations from mass culture in order to understand gendered representations of female agency in political violence. In the second section, I discuss specific methods that I use in order to analyse textual and visual representations of female agency in political violence. I describe textual methods such as presupposition and predication, predominantly visual methods such as iconology, concept of address and the ideal viewer, as well as the method of interpellation which I link to the concept of the abject. In the last section, I present the six empirical cases chosen for this study. I give a brief overview of each case as well as the rationale for choosing them. In the

conclusion, I draw together the methodological framework and re-state the focus on textual and visual representations as well as the use of popular culture as data.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 HOW: Discourse analysis

What follows from the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2 is an interest in exploring how gender and agency is represented in discourses of political violence. However, in IR there has not emerged a common understanding about the best ways to study discourse (Milliken 1999: 226) and discourse is, therefore, a highly contested term (Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002: 8). In this sub-section, I describe in greater detail what I mean by discourse and how I analyse discursive practices.

Poststructuralism's focus on discourses as articulated in written and spoken text calls for particular attention to the methodology of reading and the methodology of textual selection (Hansen 2006: 2). Commonly defined, a discourse is a linguistic practice that puts into play sets of rules and procedures for the formation of objects, speakers and themes (Shapiro 1990: 329). As a result, traditionally, discourse analysis has been concerned with written language and tends to focus on elite (and academic) rather than popular sites of discursive practices, especially in the field of international politics (Weldes 1999: 118). Roxanne Doty defines discourse as a system of statements in which each individual statement makes sense. Thus, a discourse produces interpretive possibilities by making it virtually impossible to think outside of it (Doty 1993: 302). However, discourses do not simply communicate statements or

language, but are recognisable as systems that themselves produce and fix meaning, however temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world (Shepherd 2008b: 215). Discourses are not closed systems, but overlap and are open-ended. They draw on elements of other discourses and, thus, always contain traces of past discursive formations (Hall 1996: 202). A discourse provides discursive spaces, such as concepts, categories, metaphors, models and analogies by which meaning is intertextually created. Thus, the practice of analysing empirical raw material and information as discursive forms means that a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic data is treated as ‘texts’ or ‘writing’ (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 4). As I will come back to below, I use a broad definition of representations which means that any ways of representations by which a message is communicated is valid, including visual representations. As a result, discourse also needs to be broadly defined. I use discourse defined as ‘structures of meaning-in-use’ (Milliken 1999: 231).

According to Foucault, we can only have knowledge of things if they have a meaning but at the same time it is discourse, not the things themselves, which produces knowledge. In this sense, discourses are performative; ‘practices that systematically form the object of which they speak’ (Foucault 1972: 49). In this way, Foucauldian notions of discourse are always inextricably linked with concepts of power, as something that constitutes and energises all discursive and social relations (Baxter 2003: 7). Discourses are forms of knowledge or powerful sets of assumptions, expectations and explanations that are governing mainstream social and cultural practices. Discursive practices are social practices that are produced by/through discourses (Baxter 2003: 7). The idea of discourse as social practice offers a way of seeing how we experience the world, in part through the representational capacity of language (Hall 1997).

Discourse analysis has clear political and ethical significance since in explaining discourse productivity, scholars can potentially denaturalise dominant forms of knowledge and expose to critical questioning the practices they enable (Milliken 1999: 236). In this way, (re)-telling stories can be a powerful political practice as it highlights the great deal of power invested in the way stories are presented (Zalewski 2000: 123). Moreover, politically contextualised discourse analysis combines the analysis of how texts seek to create stability with analysis of whether these constructions are being accepted or contested within the political and public domain (Hansen 2006: 30). As described in Chapter 2, I build on Cynthia Weber's concept of unconscious ideology in order to show how myths are political. I also follow Jutta Weldes' suggestion and see discourse as enabling a process of making meaning and ideology as an effect of that process. This way, a discourse has ideological effects, even though they might be invisible or unconscious, and is always implicated in the production and reproduction of power relations (Weldes 2003a: 20).

## **2.2 WHAT: Representations**

If discursive practices both manifest and construct discourse through representation and reproduction, it is practices of representation and reproduction that are the sites at which knowledge is reproduced and power is located (Hall 1997: 43; Shepherd 2008b: 215). As I explain in greater detail in Chapter 4, the existing literature on gender, agency and political violence in IR tends to focus on narratives as a form of representation which means that visual and cultural representations are excluded. Thus, in this sub-section, it is theorising of such representations that is emphasised.

As mentioned above, discourse analysis has traditionally concerned written language. However, language does not have to be verbal. In fact, discourse analysis, I argue, should not be confined to the linguistic simply because communicative structures and meaning-production by no means are limited to the linguistic. Fittingly, it was Roland Barthes who established the precedent of taking various non-discursive artefacts from popular culture as 'text'. His concept of 'textuality' loosened the written text from the author and relocated authority within the culture (Der Derian and Shapiro 1989: xix). More recently in IR, the 'aesthetic turn' has moved scholarship away from an exclusive and often very narrow reliance on diplomatic documents, statistical data, political speeches, academic treaties and other traditional sources of knowledge about the international by legitimising images, narratives and sounds as important sources for insight into world politics (Bleiker 2001: 526). In accordance with poststructuralist thought, an aesthetic approach assumes that there is always a gap between a form of representation and what is represented therein. Rather than ignoring or seeking to narrow this gap, aesthetic insight recognises that the inevitable difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of politics (Bleiker 2001: 510).

Visual representation has historically involved drawings, photography and television, but with the growth of mass media and the Internet, the relative importance of the visual has amplified (Hansen 2000: 300). Today, our culture is increasingly permeated by visual images with a variety of purposes and intended effects, whether it is CCTV footage, Google Earth, Facebook or images' preponderance in the news media. Such images can produce in us a wide array of emotions and responses, such as pleasure, desire, disgust, anger, curiosity, shock, or confusion, but they can also both exert power and act as instruments of power (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 10, 93). This is because the images we interact with on a daily basis are caught up in the power relations of the societies in which we live. We invest images with the



power to incite emotions within us, and images are also elements within the power relations between human subjects, and between individuals and institutions. Just as images are both representations and producers of the ideologies of their time, they are also factors in relations of power (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 72). Because visual imagery calls attention to questions of interpretation, perspective and their political effects and foregrounds representation, the use of visual representations suits well with a poststructuralist account (Campbell 2007: 220).

Many now argue that the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies (Rose 2001: 6). Some scholars argue that the recent interest in images and visual representations is a result of a pictorial turn that is taking over from the linguistic turn of twentieth century philosophy in social theory (Campbell 2003: 72). From cultural studies, which has a longer history of analysing the visual than IR, we learn that the capacity of images to affect us as viewers and consumers is dependent on the larger cultural meanings they invoke and the social, political and cultural contexts in which they are viewed (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 25). Hence, using theories to study images allows us to examine what images tell us about the cultures in which they are produced and, at the same time, reading and interpreting images is one way that we, as viewers, contribute to the process of assigning value to the culture in which we live (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 6, 42).

Meanings of images are created in a complex relationship among producer, viewer, image or text and social context (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 56). When images are read, readers draw upon a store of social knowledge, a cultural repertoire, a shared code (conscious or unconscious), which is always both historical and cultural. That is to say, it might differ from one culture to another, and from one historical moment to another (Storey 1993: 87).

Challenging the notion that ‘reality’ can somehow present itself unmediated to interpretation (Shepherd 2008b: 214), a poststructuralist approach offers a way to study how knowledge and power is distributed in the cultures and societies we live in. It is important that visual culture is understood in an analytical way not only by art historians and other ‘image specialists,’ but by all of us who increasingly encounter a startling array of images in our daily lives (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 4). However, it needs to be pointed out that foregrounding the visual in visual culture does not mean separating images from writing, speech, language, or others modes of representation and experience as images are often integrated with words (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 5). Therefore, when I discuss representations, I mean meaning construction in a broad sense including both visual and textual representations.

### **2.3 WHERE: Mass culture**

There are many different ways of defining ‘culture’. Stuart Hall defines culture as a process, a set of practices, but also, Hall argues, culture is about feelings, attachments and emotions as well as concepts and ideas (Hall 1997: 2). According to Cynthia Weber, culture has to do with how we make sense of the world and how we produce, reproduce, and circulate that sense (Weber 2005: 3). Studying culture understood as ‘sense-making’, ‘signifying practices’ or ‘an ensemble of stories, beliefs and habits’ means we have to pay attention to how meanings are made. We must think about how meaning-making relies on what is said and what goes without saying (Weber 2005: 4). Thus, as mentioned in Chapter 2, I define culture as ‘shared meanings’ (Hall 1997: 1).

Similar to academic analysis of visual representations, the study of popular culture has a much longer history in cultural studies than in IR. The politics of the popular is in fact ‘among the

most undervalued and therefore under-analysed aspects of international politics' (Weber 2005: 187). Still, an increasing number of scholars have and do engage with popular culture as a site to study international politics. Christine Sylvester has explored how art and museums are used within IR (Sylvester 2006). Michael Shapiro has highlighted that, in many respects, various aspects of popular culture provide counter-discourses to official strategic discourse (Shapiro 1990: 335). Lene Hansen (2006), exploring the western discourse on the Balkans during 1990s war in Bosnia, has shown how non-academic and non-political texts might influence on central foreign policy decision-makers. Jutta Weldes has shown that state policy has a pervasive cultural basis and that state action is made commonsensical through popular culture (Weldes 1999: 119). For example, Weldes has illuminated a number of strong and telling parallels between how US foreign policy discourses and the discursive universe of *Star Trek* is structured:

There might be more going on when audiences sit down to watch television than students of international relations have previously assumed. (Weldes 1999: 133)

Moreover, Weldes argues that it is possible for popular culture to challenge the boundaries of common sense, to contest the taken-for-granted (Weldes 2003a: 6). To Cynthia Weber, accessing visual culture through popular films allows us to consider the connections between IR theory and our everyday lives, between the popular and the political (Weber 2005). Weber argues that the stories and myths we find in IR theory are often the same ones we find in popular films, which means that meanings of IR theory are produced and circulated in both traditional academic 'high cultural' realms and popular 'low culture':

If the work of propagating and circulating IR myths occurs in popular films as well as in IR theories, then neglecting this realm of 'low

politics' in our attempts to come to grips with how the world works would be a mistake. We must interrogate IR theory as a site for cultural practice wherever it occurs- in classic IR texts, in classrooms, and in more popular sites of culture like film, literature, art, and television. (Weber 2005: 186)

Similarly, Roland Bleiker points out that:

If a puzzle is the main research challenge, then it can be addressed with all means available, independently of their provenance or label. A source may stem from this or that discipline, it may be academically sanctioned or not, expressed in prose or poetic form, it may be language based on visual or musical or take any other shape or form: it is legitimate as long as it helps to illuminate the puzzle in question. (Bleiker 2003: 420)

Studies of popular culture and world politics include film, fiction, television, computer games, photography and comic books that, for example, analyses how a particular region, country, or people is cinematically represented; how espionage is treated within popular fiction; or how a war (the Vietnam war) can be won through another (American success in the Gulf war) (Hansen 2006: 58; Cooke 1996: 93). Still, even if a growing number of scholars are including visual representations from popular culture in their analysis: some have pointed out that 'the legacy of the cold war lives on through popular culture' (Der Derian 2005: 27), others that we need to 'go cultural' (Weldes 1999), it remains the case that the use of popular culture is still marginalised in the study of international politics.

Today, interpretations or readings of the world often come to us through the mass media and 'television is perhaps the most crucial source of collective consciousness' (Bleiker 2001: 525). At the same time, reality and representation increasingly blur into one another as fiction makes fact. As an example, Miriam Cooke mentions an episode during the 1990s wars in the

Balkans when a Croatian admiral in Dubrovnik asked the local television station to show ten minutes of Top Gun on the evening news in order to make the Serbian fleet withdraw. The ploy worked (Cooke 1996: 76). Weber suggests that interpretations of historical narratives and their popular signifying forms are so crossed and confused with one another that attempting to police fact from fiction is likely to fail. In addition, such attempts turn a blind eye to what popular representations can tell us about the politics and the politics of desire bound up in interpretations of historical events (Weber 2002: 131). As mentioned above, the most important part of (unconscious) ideologies is that they appear to be natural or given, rather than part of a system of belief that a culture produces in order to function in a particular way (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 21). Therefore, as Weber argues:

*All cultural sites are powerful arenas in which political struggles take place. Culture is not opposed to politics. Culture is political, and politics is cultural.* (Weber 2005: 188, emphasis in original)

Popular culture has traditionally been defined as those cultural artefacts actually produced by 'the people', specifically by subordinated classes. However, following Weldes, I argue the term 'mass culture' is more useful as it designates those artefacts that, while consumed by 'the people', are not necessarily produced by them (Weldes 1999: 117). With this theoretical move, popular culture is not contrasted to 'high' culture, culture is not opposed to politics, and both traditional news media and popular sites of discursive practices are included in the analysis of world politics. Moreover, what is considered 'real' does not have to be separated from 'fiction' as both are representations of events; both include the telling of stories.

Furthermore, popular culture is one of the narrative spaces of visual culture which in turn is fundamental to (unconscious) ideologies and power relations. Film and television are therefore media through which we see reinforced ideological constructions (Sturken and

Cartwright 2001: 21-22). A particular representation in a popular cultural text might support or undermine existing relations of power, or both at once. Thus, examining such texts helps us to highlight the workings of power (Weldes 2003a: 7). By focusing on representations in popular culture and mass media, this research project contributes to Weldes' wider attempt to 'pluralise' world politics by multiplying 'the sites and categories that count as political' (Weldes 2003a: 6). This is because, as Bleiker states:

The dilemmas that currently haunt world politics, from terrorism to raising inequalities, are far too serious not to employ the full register of human intelligence to understand and deal with them. (Bleiker 2001: 529)

By using broad definitions of both what to study and where to find the empirical data, this research project aims to capture a deeper understanding of how female agency in political violence is communicated and what such communications mean. This is how this research project offers a way of thinking differently about gender, agency and political violence.

### 3. METHODS

As mentioned in Chapter 2, I build on Barthes' work on myth construction as theoretical inspiration but, crucially, I do not follow his methodological framework of denotation and connotation. Instead, in this sub-section, I explain specific textual and visual methods associated with poststructuralist discourse analysis and used in order to analyse representations in mass culture.

### 3.1 Textual methods

**Presupposition** is a method that concerns background knowledge when reading a text or an image. It is about what is taken for granted in the representation, what kind of world the representation is constructing and what is considered true in that constructed world. As Roxanne Doty explains:

Statements rarely speak for themselves. Even the most straightforward and ostensibly clear statements bring with them all sorts of presuppositions or background knowledge that is taken to be true. In the absence of the ‘truth’ of the background knowledge and the world it presupposes, the statement would not make sense. (Doty 1993: 306)

Presupposition is, therefore, an important textual mechanism that by creating background knowledge constructs a particular kind of world in which certain things are recognised as true (Doty 1993: 306). Furthermore, **predication** involves the linking of certain qualities to particular subjects through the use of predicates and the adverbs and adjectives that modify them (Milliken 1990: 231). A predicate affirms a quality, attribute or property of a person or thing. Attributes attached to subjects are important for constructing identities for those subjects and for telling us what subjects can and cannot do. This is linked to whether the subject is ascribed agency or not.

In combination, presupposition and predication offer to illuminate the tension between identities of life-giving and life-taking and thereby make the Myth of Motherhood visible in representations of female agency in political violence. According to Doty, if differences are constructed according to the same logic in a variety of texts, we can reasonably suggest that there is a dominant discourse (Doty 1993: 309). In a similar manner, if tensions between identities of life-giving and life-taking are presented according to the same logic in these

different empirical cases, there is a dominant discourse. This also means that the unconscious ideology, which is an effect of that discourse, has been made conscious and the myth has been re-politicised.

Moreover, texts create a 'reality' by linking particular subjects and objects to one another. The production of subjects and objects are always vis-à-vis other subjects and objects. This is called **subject positioning**. What defines a particular kind of subject is, in large part, the relationships which that subject is positioned in relation to other kinds of subjects. In this way, subject positioning involves a degree of agency ascribed to the subject. According to Doty, some of the important kinds of relationships that position subjects are those of opposition, identity, similarity, and complementarity (Doty 1993: 306). Subjects can be thought of as positions within particular discourses, intelligible only with reference to a specific set of categories, concepts and practices (Doty 1993: 303). Subject positioning is not limited to textual representations, thus, below I link the method of subject positioning with the concept of the ideal viewer, interpellation and the abject.

### **3.2 Visual methods**

According to Rose, interpretations of visual images broadly concur that there are three sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site(s) of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site(s) where it is seen by various audiences (Rose 2001: 16). Most if not all images have a meaning that is preferred by their producers, but analysing images according to the intentions of their producers is rarely a completely useful strategy since readers have no way of knowing for certain what a producer intended his or her image to mean. Furthermore, finding out a producer's intentions often does not tell us much about the



image, since intentions may not match up with what viewers actually take away from an image or text. In addition, viewers themselves bring a particular set of cultural associations with them which will affect their individual interpretation of an image (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 45-6). Thus, the focus of this research project lies on the site of the image itself.

When analysing images you can either focus on issues of reception or **concepts of address**. The distinction between address and reception is one between thinking about the ideal viewer of an image, and the potential real viewer who looks. Address refers to the way that an image constructs certain responses from an **idealised viewer**, whereas reception is about the ways in which actual viewers respond (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 72). Here, I focus on address only, which means that I am not interested in how audiences actually interpret an image. In other words, I am not trying to find the 'real' meaning of an image, but how an image constructs certain responses from an idealised viewer. I analyse how discourses construct meaning.

Another method useful in order to study visual representations is **iconology**. An icon is an image that refers to something outside of its individual components, something (or someone) that has great symbolic meaning for many people. Icons are often perceived to represent universal concepts, emotions and meanings (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 36). However, icons do not represent individuals, nor do they represent universal values (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 37). For example, the image of mother and child is everywhere in Western art. It is widely believed to represent universal concepts of maternal emotion and devotion, the crucial bond between a mother and her offspring, and the dependence of that child upon her. The image is perceived as an icon of motherhood and, by extension, the importance of

motherhood throughout the world and in all human history. The sheer number of paintings created with a mother and child theme throughout the history of Western art attests not simply to the centrality of the Madonna figure in Christianity but also to the idea that the bond between mother and child represented in images like this is universally understood to be natural, not culturally constructed (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 36). More recent images of women and children subsequently gain meaning in relation to this tradition of Madonna and child paintings. However, these images might not serve as icon for motherhood in other cultures, thus, rather than being read as evidence of universal ideals of motherhood, such images should be read as an example of specifically Western and particularly Christian beliefs about women's roles as mothers in Western culture (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 37; 56). For this project, iconology involves relating the image of mother and child to this historicity of similar images or icons. In this way, the images are read as representations of cultural values of motherhood and its association with 'natural' femininity; as representations of heteronormativity.

As mentioned above, the method of subject positioning involves a degree of agency ascribed to the subject, as well as its relation to the object and other subjects. Moreover, as theorised by Foucault, subject position is the place that a particular discourse asks a human subject to adopt within it (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 368). In this sense, subject position is a term used to define those ways that images designate an ideal position for their intended spectators. There is an ideal spectator of a film regardless of how any particular viewer might make personal meaning of the film. In this way, subject positioning facilitates analysis of not only how a subject is positioned in an image, its relation to objects, if the subject has agency in the image, who is passive, who is active, who is looking at who etc, but also in order to analyse

the discourse's ideal position for their intended spectators; what subject positioning the image tells us to take. This is also linked to the method of interpellation.

In order to offer a deeper analysis of female agency in political violence, this research project is interested in the communicative processes of how representations of female agency in political violence are gendered. In order to explain this, the concepts of interpellation and the abject are crucial. **Interpellation** is a term coined by Louis Althusser to describe the process by which ideological systems call out to or 'hail' social subjects and tell them their place in the system. Interpellation is when we come to recognise ourselves and identify with the ideal subject in the subject position offered in a particular visual representation (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 203). Interpellation is similar to how subject positioning of a discourse works but interpellation also refers to how these representations work to hail individuals so that they come to accept the representations as natural and accurate (Weldes 1999: 163). I argue that this resonates strongly with myth construction and the concept of unconscious ideologies. It resonates with myth construction in the sense that the essential function of myth is the naturalisation of the concept. By accepting the representations as natural and accurate, the myth is hidden and the ideologies at work are kept unconscious. This is how we interpret representations as common sense. To clarify, I use the concept of interpellation, rather than just subject positioning, in order to dig deeper into how common sense is communicated. Furthermore, I only use the concept of interpellation in the context of unconscious ideology, not as linked to ideology in a traditional (Marxist) sense.

As another innovation of this new theoretical move, I also suggest that by building on Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, the concept of interpellation can be used where unconscious ideologies call out to social subjects *not* to identify with the subject position, but rather in

opposition to the subject position. In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva explores, through literature, different ways in which abjection, as a source of horror, works within patriarchal societies. Here, I will draw on her discussion of abjection in its construction of the human subject constituted through transgression of borders and through exclusion of what is different or other.

Like the object, the abject is opposed to the subject, but the difference is as follows: ‘What is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses’ (Kristeva 1982: 2).

Abjection [...] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of flaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you... (Kristeva 1982: 4)

Kristeva defines the abject as that which ‘disturbs identity, system, order’ and ‘does not respect borders, positions, rules’ (Kristeva 1982: 4). Ultimately, the abject is part of ourselves. We reject it, locating it as that which we are not. Because of this, the abject may reveal as much about ourselves as it does about external reality. The abject both fascinates and horrifies because it thrives on ambiguity and the transgression of taboos and boundaries. This is how the abject reveals our own conceptions of the world and our normative disposition (Kristeva 1982: 10). In this sense, the abject has transgressed the borders and rules and, as a result, unconscious ideologies call out to social subjects not to identify with the subject/abject position but rather to connect individuals as different from it, within the boundaries of normal and appropriate behaviour. This is how the abject not only highlights the boundary of the myth but also challenges its content to a point where meaning risks collapsing.

## 4. EMPIRICAL CASES

### 4.1 Introducing the empirical cases

As mentioned in the introduction, the cases I have chosen to analyse are Faye Turney, Lynndie England, Janis Karpinski, *Britz* (2007), *Female Agents* (2008) and *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* (2008). Here, I will give a more detailed account of each case and then discuss the rationale for choosing them.

#### *Faye Turney*

Faye Turney was one of fifteen British sailors and marines held captive in Iran for two weeks in the spring of 2007. The Navy personnel were patrolling the waters between Iraq and Iran when they were arrested and taken to Iran by the Revolutionary guards. Faye Turney was not only the lone woman in the group but she was also a mother, information which was revealed in the *Sun* on the fourth day of their captivity. Once this information became known, most media representation was focused on Turney and her role as a mother. Her identity as a mother seemed to be in contention with her identity as a soldier and in the UK a debate was sparked regarding female soldiers on ‘the frontline’ and female soldiers in combat positions. Turney was also used by the Iranians as she was forced to write letters to the British government and her family asking them to make sure British forces pull out of Iraq. Once released, Faye Turney was offered and accepted close to £100,000 to tell about ‘her ordeal’ in the *Sun* and in an hour-long interview with one of the UK’s main terrestrial television channels, ITV.

### *Lynndie England*

In May 2004, the *New Yorker* ran the story ‘Torture at Abu Ghraib: American soldiers brutalized Iraqis’ (Hersh 2004) and soon thousands of photos seemingly depicting US soldiers abusing and degrading Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, many with sexual undertones, were released. This is commonly known as the Abu Ghraib scandal. Lynndie England was one of three female army personnel amongst a small group of US military police officers who were punished for the scandal. England is the most well-known of the people involved and she is by far the most published and written about. England was not actually a military officer but a desk clerk tasked with logging prisoners. As such, she was not supposed to be in the particular part of the prison where interrogations took place by intelligence officers and where most of the photos were taken. However, England was in a relationship with one of the military police officers, Charles Graner, and supposedly came to see him while he was working the nightshift in that part of the prison (Morris 2008). When the news story regarding prisoner abuse broke, as well as during her trials, England was pregnant with Graner’s child, which emphasised her role as a woman and as a mother. Graner later married one of the other women involved and England was abandoned with her unborn baby. In order to receive a lower punishment England initially agreed to plead guilty, but after a witness statement by Graner, who said that England was only following orders by superiors, the deal was thrown out. Then, in her second trial, her defence team instead tried to demonstrate her innocence. In the end, she was sentenced to three years in prison for ‘posing’ in photos. Graner and another senior officer received ten-year sentences whereas the other low-ranking soldiers received much shorter sentences (Morris 2008; Sjoberg 2007).

### *Janis Karpinski*

Janis Karpinski became the first female US General ever to command soldiers in a combat zone when she took control of the 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade tasked with running all prison facilities in Iraq in June 2003 (Karpinski with Strassner 2005: 4). Their mission was prisoner of war operations in 16 different facilities spread all over Iraq. Abu Ghraib prison was the biggest and the only one in which interrogations were carried out (by military intelligence officers). During the autumn of 2003, the control of Abu Ghraib prison was transferred from Karpinski's Military Police Brigade to a Military Intelligence Brigade. Crucially, however, military police officers were still working at Abu Ghraib. This created a blurry chain of command structure. In effect, it meant that Janis Karpinski was no longer in charge of Abu Ghraib, but at the same time some of her soldiers were working in that facility. The blurry chain of command structure enabled Karpinski to be made a scapegoat for the Abu Ghraib scandal. The Pentagon and the Army accused her of bad leadership because she was unaware of what her soldiers were up to. In reality, Karpinski only had limited access to Abu Ghraib (Karpinski, *Signal City*, 13/11/2005).

In the media representations, Janis Karpinski is referred to as the highest officer to be punished for the scandal. However, she was actually cleared of any involvement in the abuse. Instead, Karpinski was punished for weak leadership and for not having disclosed a false shoplifting accusation before she was promoted to General. Janis Karpinski is the first General ever to have been demoted in US military history (Karpinski, *Signal City*, 13/11/2005).

Janis Karpinski refused to be silenced and protested loudly to the representation of herself but also her soldiers. She published an autobiography and appeared in various media outlets

telling her story. Her alternative story of events has since been supported by for example Errol Morris' film *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008) and higher ranking officers, such as General Sanchez who was the Head of the Army in Iraq, have since been punished (although not demoted).

### *Britz*

*Britz* is a BAFTA-award winning two-part television drama shown in 2007 at primetime on one of the UK's mainstream terrestrial television channels, Channel 4. The drama is about a brother and a sister, Sohail and Nasima, and their different personal experiences as British Muslims during increasing tensions between counter-terrorism laws and civil liberties in a post-'9/11' and '7/7' 'war on terror' society. In the first part, 'Sohail's story', we follow the male lead character, Sohail, as he secretly joins the Security Service (MI5) and takes part in surveillance operations of terrorist suspects within Muslim communities. In the last part, 'Nasima's story', we follow the lead female character, Nasima, and her transformation into a suicide bomber. Consequently, this analysis focuses on scenes from 'Nasima's story'. Nasima travels to Pakistan to train as a fighter before she returns to London and makes the last preparations. At the end, Sohail who has been gathering intelligence is trying to prevent the terror attack, unaware of that it is his own sister who is the perpetrator. Just before Nasima is about to push the button and ignite her bomb (which she is wearing under a maternity suit), Sohail reaches for her, hugs her and asks her not to do it. In 'Sohail's story' the screen then turns black. In 'Nasima's story' the screen turns white. In the epilogue of 'Nasima's story', a martyrdom statement is read out where Nasima explains her political motifs.



## *Female Agents*

*Female Agents* is a French popular film from 2008 inspired by the women who fought as secret agents during the Second World War when France was occupied by Germany. *Female Agents* is a film about heroines and heroism. It was promoted with the slogan: 'In times of war, heroism is not just for men' and the subtitle on the DVD-cover states: 'D-day depends on them'. The film follows a group of female agents who are put together by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), set up by Winston Churchill and run by a man called Buckmaster. The group of four women (Louise, Jeanne, Gaelle and Suzy) is initially formed by Louise's brother Pierre, a SOE agent, in order to rescue a British geologist who is being treated at a German military hospital in Normandy thanks to being disguised as a German soldier. The geologist's mission was to take samples from the beaches in Normandy in preparation for Operation Phoenix, the construction of artificial harbours that enabled the landing on D-day. This is why D-day depends on these particular female agents.

After their first successful mission, Pierre refuses to let the women return to safety in the UK. Instead, he wants them to undertake another mission: to travel to Paris and kill an influential Nazi officer, Heindrich. In Paris, all agents but Jeanne soon find themselves caught by the Germans. Gaelle commits suicide in prison, Suzy is shot and killed by Heindrich, her former fiancé. Louise is tortured while in captivity but later rescued by Jeanne. At the end of the film, Louise finally manages to kill Heindrich, but only because Jeanne diverts attention to herself and subsequently is arrested. When the war is over, Louise, who is back at safety in the UK, learns that Jeanne, who bravely sacrificed herself, was eventually hanged in a concentration camp. Louise is the only one amongst the group of female agents who survives the war.

### *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*

*The Baader-Meinhof Complex* is a German popular film from 2008 about the German terrorist organisation Red Army Faction (RAF) and their activities in the 1970s. The organisation is often also referred to as the Baader-Meinhof group after Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof who were part of the core group. Baader and Meinhof, but also Baader's girlfriend Gudrun Ensslin, are the main characters of the film. The narrative of the film particularly follows Ulrike Meinhof's transformation from a politically minded and outspoken journalist to a perpetrator and instigator of political violence. The film shows how the members of the core group meet and how Ulrike, an established journalist at the time, joins Baader and Ensslin in the new formation named the Red Army Faction. Influenced by political events such as the Vietnam War, the group's mission is to defeat US imperialism. Much of their attacks are, therefore, targeting US Army bases and headquarters, banks and influential publishers.

Due to the RAF's violent actions, West Germany declared its own 'war on terror' (Colvin 2009: 14) and soon most members of the organisation were arrested. Meinhof, Baader, Ensslin and a few other core members were initially kept in isolation at a high-security prison but were united at another prison after a couple of years. Their trials went on for several years and Ulrike Meinhof never saw the end of them. She died an unexplained death in her prison cell. The media reported on her suicide but the RAF members believed she was murdered. Outside the prison, new members, some of whom had never met Baader, Meinhof or Ensslin, continued the struggle. They took hostages at the US embassy in Stockholm and in alliance with people fighting for the liberation of Palestine, they hijacked a plane, demanding the core members of RAF to be released (as well as Palestinian political prisoners held in Israel). When the hijacking operation failed, Baader, Ensslin and two other RAF members chose to

commit suicide in prison (one woman survived). While the film continues with the newer formations of the RAF and while a majority of the RAF members were women, I focus on the representation of Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin as they are not only the most famous members of the RAF and the main characters of the film (with Andreas Baader), but also because they are positioned against each other in the film negotiating both femininity, masculinity and motherhood.

#### **4.2 Rationale for case selection**

As mentioned above, one of this research project's contributions to feminist IR scholarship is to analyse gender, agency and political violence in non-traditional spaces such as popular culture. For this reason, I have chosen to look into three 'real' empirical cases and three fictional empirical cases. These cases by no means provide a sample of the world, but are merely a series of representations of the puzzle in question. I put 'real' within citation marks because following my theoretical and methodological framework, I argue that both 'real' and fictional cases are representations of events. They are both part of story-telling.

More specifically, 'Nasima's story' in *Britz* is not only one of few representations in popular culture where the focus is on a female perpetrator of political violence, but the lead character also wears a maternity suit and hides the explosives by looking pregnant. In other words, Nasima is using 'motherhood' as a political strategy in order to achieve her political goal. Therefore, *Britz* not only speaks directly to female agency in political violence but also provides an excellent example of how ideas about motherhood functions to discipline the audience into essentialist understandings of gender, agency and violence. As mentioned above, Faye Turney was predominantly described in her role as a mother rather than her role

as British navy personnel which makes her an excellent case to use in order to study gender, agency and political violence through motherhood. In addition, even though Janis Karpinski did not have children, there was still a focus on motherhood, or rather a lack of motherhood, as she was often referred to as 'childless' in the media representation. Moreover, the case of Karpinski is also validated by the fact that she held an unusual high military ranking for a woman and because she remains the only General to have been demoted in US military history. Lynndie England was pregnant when the Abu Ghraib scandal was revealed as well as during her trials which put her motherhood to the fore. England was also chosen because she was by far the most written about and because she received a disproportionately high penalty. Last, in both *Female Agents* and *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*, motherhood is absolutely central to the storyline. In *Female Agents* all of the female agents involved are childless, yet, the film is all about motherhood. Most obviously, we follow Louise's pregnancy through the film, a pregnancy that in the end is sacrificed for the mission. Louise knows that she is pregnant with her dead husband's child when she is being tortured. In the epilogue, we learn that the real character that Louise is based upon died childless. *Female Agents* is also chosen because it claims to ascribe heroism in war to women. Thus, through heroism, *Female Agents* communicates ideas about gender, agency and political violence. In *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*, the majority of the members, and thereby perpetrators of political violence, are women. As such, the film provides an exceptional example of representations of female agency in political violence. The introduction to the book upon which the film is based also makes several references to the 'war on terror' (Aust 2008). As such, this film is understood with references to the 'war on terror'. Furthermore, Ulrike Meinhof's transformation from non-violent to a perpetrator of violence is negotiated and constructed with references to her role as a mother.

The empirical material might have been produced in different national cultures, but it has been interpreted and mediated for an English-speaking culture or population. Moreover, the stories written about these cases are all constructed and produced within a Western 'war on terror' culture. This means that even though two of the empirical cases are depicting events that took place long before the launch of the global 'war on terror', we still interpret and understand these films with references to the 'war on terror'. All cases were made by/for people inhabiting such a cultural terrain. Furthermore, all cases include the tension between life-giving and life-taking female identity and, as such, they all communicate 'motherhood'. In this sense, 'motherhood' is everywhere and all cases, therefore, directly speak to the Myth of Motherhood. Each case is part of discursive practices that construct knowledge about gender, agency and political violence. Separate and combined these cases tell us something about how female agency in political violence is communicated in our culture. This is the rationale for choosing these particular cases.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have discussed methodological implications of the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. Following the introduction, I discussed how and why I use discourse analysis, that it is representations that I analyse and that I find such representations, textual and visual, in mass culture. In the third section, I described specific textual methods such as presupposition, predication and subject positioning, as well as methods useful in the analysis of visual representations such as the concept of address, the ideal viewer, iconology and

interpellation. In the last section, I presented the six empirical cases and argued that because all of them address ‘motherhood’ and reference the ‘war on terror’, all of them, separately and combined, can tell us not only how representations of female agency in political violence are gendered but also what implications and meanings such gendered representations have in a Western ‘war on terror’ culture.

Following on from the theoretical insights explained in Chapter 2 and the methodological implications of those insights described in this chapter, the next chapter explores the existing literature on gender, agency and political violence in IR in order to illustrate more clearly how a research project with this theoretical and methodological framework fills a gap and as such makes original contributions to existing knowledge.

## Chapter 4

# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, I analyse representations of agency and, more specifically, I use the concept of subject positions rather than political subjectivity in my analysis of agency. This is different from most feminist contributions on female agency in political violence. However, in order to clearly demonstrate how this research project makes original contributions to knowledge, I start by discussing a broader range of feminist IR literature on gender, agency and war before I discuss academic works more closely linked to this research project. The chapter has two main sections. First, I unpack two gendered assumptions present in stories of war and peace: the idea of women as victims of war and women's association with peace, in particular through their roles as mothers. Here, I discuss contributions that have shown how stories of war are gendered and how, as a result, women are denied agency as they are positioned as victims in need of protection. Then, I discuss how stories of peace are gendered. In particular, I explore theorising from a feminist standpoint because this is where motherhood has been most closely linked to agency and peace within feminist IR. This includes concepts such as a maternal thinking and an ethics of care, as well as women's political activism for peace. In this section, agency remains associated with working for peace rather than as participation in warfare.

The second body of literature concerns female agency in political violence and warfare more specifically. First, I discuss literature that engages with ideas about women's heroism in war and how such heroism is linked to motherhood. Second, I address literature that has illuminated how individual women are actually participating in and contributing to warfare as a way of countering stereotypes of women as 'naturally' peaceful. In the last sub-section, I engage with literature on gender, agency and the military because, as I explain in Chapter 2, I define agency in political violence as a capacity to kill in order to capture the idea of life-taking which unites both legitimate and illegitimate agency. In the conclusion, I recap and re-state how this research project fills a gap in the existing literature and as such makes original contributions to knowledge. Mostly, such contributions are a result of this research project's poststructuralist account of female agency in political violence. More specifically, such contributions include the analysis of representations of agency rather than 'real' agency; the use of a broader definition of agency in political violence encompassing both legitimate and illegitimate agency; and the inclusion of visual and cultural representations of gender, agency and political violence. I argue that a poststructuralist account of female agency in political violence in this way offers a nuanced understanding of gender, agency and political violence.

## 2. GENDER, AGENCY AND WAR

In this section, I consider two ways in which feminist contributions have pointed out that traditional war stories are gendered. First, I explain literature that show how women are most often positioned in the role of victims in need of protection. In the second sub-section, I



unpack the links between motherhood, peace and nonviolence and show how women's political activism has utilised gendered assumptions about war and peace. I also discuss contributions to feminist standpoint theorising as this is where motherhood has been linked to agency for peace.

## **2.1 Gendered war stories**

Traditionally, in most cultures, it has been men's lot to fight while women watch, suffer, applaud, ameliorate, and forgive. In war men become 'warriors.' If they are killed, they are killed in action. Their deaths represent a sacrifice that is in part chosen and thus is a testament to courage. A man makes war partly for the woman he protects, who is his audience...her admiring tears make his fighting possible; her danger from his enemy makes his fighting necessary. Raped or killed, her possessions plundered, 'his' woman is the last prize and the sweetest revenge his enemy exacts from him. (Ruddick 2002: 143)

Historically, war has been linked to men and masculinity, whereas peace has long historical associations with women and femininity. Feminist scholars have shown that in traditional stories of war, men make war and women keep the peace; men go to the front and women stay at home; men fight and women are fought for (Cooke 1996: 80; Cooke and Woollacott 1993). Jean-Bethke Elshtain phrases these binary constructions of men's and women's roles as the personae of Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls. Here, man is construed as violent and aggressive and woman as nonviolent and pacifist (Elshtain 1995). Because of these categorisations, women are seen as incapable of protecting themselves, and this subsequently serves as the grounds on which to persuade men to exert their masculinity and vanquish the

enemy; they are the reason why men fight (Kumar 2004: 298). Hence, women, as 'Beautiful Souls', are innocent of the war but the thing that warriors are responsible for defending. Women, in these discourses, become at once the victims of war and the causes for war (Elshtain 1995: 4). This is what Elshtain termed the 'myth of protection'. Moreover, Iris Marion Young argues that the subordinate relation of those in the protected position is central to the logic of masculinist protection. Hence, the logic of masculinist protection provides a framework where in return for male-protection, the woman concedes critical distance from decision-making autonomy (Young 2003: 4). According to this logic, the most prominent role that women can play is that of victim. Women can suffer rape, torture, or death during war, giving the male soldier the special duty to protect her from such consequences (Kumar 2004: 297; German 2008: 142). What is more, the binary constructions of war stories in this way proclaim that the sex segregation is justified for biological reasons: the men are strong, therefore, they must protect the women who are weak. It is written in their genes that men shall be active and women passive; men are the subject and women are the objects (Cooke 1996: 16; Young 2003: 8). The myth of protection has not only been an important motivator for the recruitment of armed forces as well as to motivate aggressive war (Young 2003: 10), but it has also sustained support for war by both men and women (Tickner 2002: 337).

Not only do traditional narratives of war make many other aspects of war such as stories of pacific males or aggressive women invisible, but it also underlines men as agents and women as passive objects in international politics, regardless of what individual men and women are doing (Pettman 2004: 89). These social identities of men and women, past and present, do not denote what men and women really are in time of war, but function instead to re-create and secure women's location as non-combatants and men as warriors (Elshtain 1995: 4). Even though there is evidence of women's active participation in warfare, the polarisation of men

and women as corresponding to war/peace, frontline/home and other notions of women's and men's gendered roles in war and conflict persists (Coulter 2008: 57; Steans 2008: 160).

During the 1990s, mass rape and sexual violence became a visible and highly 'successful' weapon of war in conflicts in the Balkans, the genocide in Rwanda and elsewhere, which led to the inclusion of rape as a war crime by the international legal community (Goldstein 2001: 363). As a result, literature engaging with women as victims of rape and sexual violence also became prominent. Scholars such as Korac noted that within nationalist discourses, women are seen as precious property of the enemy. Women and their bodies become territories to be seized and conquered; and rape, thus, becomes a powerful symbolic weapon against the enemy (Korac 1996: 137). Inger Skjelsbæk argues that the use of sexual violence in times of war can be perceived as a way of reaffirming patriarchal hierarchies between men and women (or between males). The strategic purpose of the use of sexual violence in this way is to manifest the militaristic masculine identity of the male perpetrator (Skjelsbæk 2001: 216). Although important, the literature on women as rape victims risks reinforcing traditional boundaries of victim and perpetrators and the myth of protection. Scholars such as Miranda Alison and Lynne Segal have noted that much of the feminist work on rape, including wartime rape, presents the issue purely in the context of male-female gendered power relations. Alison points out that some see rape as a universal male tendency towards indiscriminate violence against women and a generalised masculine desire to maintain a system of social control over all women (Alison 2007: 78). Instead, both Segal and Alison have emphasised that men too are victims of sexual humiliation and rape. Male to male

wartime sexual violence is no less gendered nor any less ethnicised than male to female violence (Segal 2008: 32; Alison 2007).<sup>6</sup>

Other contributions have highlighted that the distinction between perpetrators, victims or actors is much more complicated (Moser and Clark 2001; Shepherd 2007). Chris Coulter has explored the difference between ideas about women in humanitarian discourses and conflict analyses, where someone who has been raped generally is regarded as a victim and someone who has been a fighter is a perpetrator, with women's own 'real' motivations for becoming fighters during the wars in Sierra Leone (Coulter 2008: 65-66). Coulter found that most women fighting in the war in Sierra Leone had multiple experiences of having been at one time or another fighters, rape victims, looters, mothers, or lovers. Thus, Coulter suggests that women are agents and make their own choices but that these choices are often circumscribed by hierarchical structures and specific contexts: 'My informants were neither ill-fated victims with no agency, nor ferocious perpetrators in command of their own destiny' (Coulter 2008: 69). For some women, becoming a fighter was their best option, there were few alternative strategies. By becoming a perpetrator, Coulter suggests, one perhaps also feels that one escapes being a victim and perhaps the only way to gain even the least bit of control over one's own life in this milieu was to take up a weapon and assume the role of a killer (Coulter 2008: 61). The point is, however, that 'one does not suddenly stop being a victim just by committing a violent act, just as one does not escape being a perpetrator just because one is also a victim' (Coulter 2008: 69). Mats Utas has also highlighted problems in the prevailing humanitarian aid discourse in Liberia as he argues that women are encouraged to present themselves as predominantly 'victims', in particular by mentioning that they have been raped (Utas 2005).

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<sup>6</sup> See also Zarkov (2001) on sexual violence and the construction of masculinity.

Another body of literature has focused on how wars have been motivated and fought on gendered terms. Since the attacks in the US on 11 September, 2001 and the launch of the 'war on terror', feminist scholars have shown how the myth of protection underpins the Bush administration's security rhetoric:

In spite of the Bush administration's appointment of the first female national security advisor, our TV screens after 9/11 were full of (mostly white) men in charge briefing us about 'America's new war' both at home and abroad. (Tickner 2002: 335)

As a result, 'September 11 and its repercussions have appeared, then, to be all about men attacking, saving lives, and responding through further attack, which seems normal' (Pettman 2004: 88). The reason for women's exclusion, J. Ann Tickner argues, was a process of re-masculinisation in the US. Tickner argues that gender is a powerful legitimator of war and national security and that our acceptance of a re-masculinised society during times of war and uncertainty rises considerably (Tickner 2002: 336). Tickner suggests that we feel safer when 'our men' are protecting us (against other men) and our way of life and that often in times of conflict, women are seen only as victims (Tickner 2002: 334-335). However, both Jan Jindy Pettman and Laura Shepherd have pointed out that rather than being invisible, women appeared in ways long embedded in the traditional gendered war story: alongside men as victims and relatives of victims of the attacks on 11 September 2001 (Pettman 2004: 88). In this way, women are identified with the family as mothers, sisters and daughters rather than as citizens. Shepherd argues that 'woman' was discursively permitted to mother, care, shop and support, all behaviours associated with a very traditionalist model of gender (Shepherd 2006: 24). Other than these allowable demonstrations of agency, women performing femininities post-'9/11' were silenced and absented from public debate (Hunt and Rygiel 2006).

A gendered terminology was also used in order to separate 'us' from 'them'. Iris Marion Young argues that the US has repeatedly appealed to the primacy of its role as protector of innocent citizens and liberator of women and children to justify consolidating and centralising executive power at home and dominative war abroad (Young 2003: 10). The women of Afghanistan constituted the ultimate victims, putting the US in the position of the ultimate protector (Young 2003: 17). Similarly, Shepherd argues that a gendered discourse that centred on notions of appropriate protection and care towards women served to create and perpetuate a particular understanding of the situation and to organise a response based on this understanding, a response that meant war was appropriate to the situation in Afghanistan. The construction of woman-as-victim marked the enemy abroad as the 'Irrational Barbarian' in need of rectification and punishment from the 'Figure of Authority' (Shepherd 2006: 19-20, 27). Pettman argues that the women of Afghanistan, as symbols of difference, of Otherness, were utilised by 'our men setting out to rescue their women, from their men' echoing the myth of protection (Pettman 2004: 89). Furthermore, Ferguson argues that the 'war on terror' was launched in the name of women's rights through a narrative of chivalry where those who respect their women are civilised, those who do not are barbarians (Ferguson 2005: 12, 19). However, as Jill Steans has pointed out, despite the use of a women's rights rhetoric, the Bush administration was unwilling to listen to the same women they were seeking to liberate (Steans 2008: 164). A similar rhetoric was later applied to Iraq as gendered and racialised representations of the war were used to convince Americans that the invasion of Iraq would liberate the Iraqi people from a brutal dictator. Hunt and Rygiel argue that this engendering of the war not only constructs the 'victimized women to be rescued', but also their 'hyper-masculine rescuers' and 'cowardly oppressors' (Hunt and Rygiel 2006: 9). Ferguson argues that the feminisation of the victims of the Taliban and of Saddam Hussein serves to

masculinise and justify US military action (Ferguson 2005: 31). Therefore, women, when and if they appear, are typically represented as being acted upon rather than as actors themselves, as casualties of the terror attacks, mothers of fallen soldiers, victims of repressive dictators, and widows rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of war (Hunt and Rygiel 2006: 1).

This body of literature has done much to show how ideas about women's and men's roles during war are gendered, how wars are fought on gendered terms and how the idea of women as victims construct them as passive objects in need of protection and as such without agency. As such, the literature covered in this section fails to acknowledge women's agency during war. Next, I turn to contexts in which women traditionally have been ascribed agency, namely, in their work for peace.

## **2.2 Gendered peace stories: Motherhood and agency**

A distinctive and joint creation of philosophical abstraction and sexual fantasy, war's body kills and suffers; it does not give birth. (Ruddick 2002: 204)

Within the system of signs in war, there are certain myths about male and female identities which become accentuated; female identity is seen as life-giving, whereas male identity is seen as life-taking (Skjelsbæk 2001: 220). Thus, women are designated as non-combatants and, in effect, peaceful, because of the part they play in the reproductive process. In this subsection, I focus on motherhood as a starting point for work on agency and peace.

Historically, it is predominantly women who in greater numbers have organised against militarism and committed themselves to working for peace. According to Nira Yuval-Davies,

the image of women resisting wars has been in existence in the Western public imagination at least since *Lysistrata* was first shown in Athens in the fifth century BC (Yuval-Davies 1997: 94). The long history of women's activism in peace movements include the Women's Peace Party which during the First World War drew together over a thousand women and founded the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), aimed at tracing the links between war, nationalism, masculinity and violence (Pettman 2004: 85). Furthermore, women's peace groups helped win the Test Ban Treaty in the early 1960s, influenced US disengagement from Vietnam War in the 1970s, and during the 1980s, women organisations notably the Greenham common protests in the UK developed specifically feminine modes of politics to work for peace (Goldstein 2001: 44; Enloe 2000). In this sense, the gendered nature of war created a political space for women as peace activists; peace became a subject that women could legitimately speak about (Steans 2006: 59). Indeed, women peace activists often invoke the 'natural' peacefulness of women and thereby use gendered identities provided by traditional narratives of war as a platform for political action. In particular, women's legitimacy as peace activists were made through their roles as mothers, linking motherhood, peace and women's rights (Segal 2008: 23; Steans 2006: 59). For example, the early suffragette movement argued that maternal urges made women different from men, but that women's peacefulness was evidence of moral superiority rather than inferiority (Steans 2006: 58). More recent examples include organisations such as Women in Black, an anti-war movement originated in Israel but also active in the former Yugoslavia, CodePink, which among other things organises annual rallies on Mother's Day and Valentine's Day against US involvement in current wars, and individuals such as Cindy Sheehan who protested against the war in Iraq through her role as a mother after her son was killed in action.<sup>7</sup> Among women

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<sup>7</sup> For more information see [www.womeninblack.org](http://www.womeninblack.org), [www.codepink4peace.org](http://www.codepink4peace.org) and Sheehan (2006).



involved in such transnational political activity, motherhood tends to serve as a unifying idea since all women are perceived to be potential mothers. This way, barriers of race, class and religious differences among activists can be overcome (Steans 2006: 59).

Despite the close links between peace and femininity visible in women's political activism, most feminist scholarship in IR, due to their constructivist orientation, is critical of such essentialist claims rendering women 'naturally' peaceful. Yet, contributions to standpoint feminism, sometimes referred to as 'difference feminism', have argued that women do have a special relationship to peace based in their experience of motherhood with its obligation to care on the part of the vast majority of women. This experience, they argue, offers a way to critique traditional approaches to the study of war and peace and to tell alternative war stories (Steans 2006: 48, 58). Hence, within IR it is contributions to standpoint feminism that most clearly have forged a link between motherhood, agency and peace. Standpoint feminism shifts the study from abstract states to how *real* living women are impacted by economic and security structures within and across state boundaries. In particular, standpoint feminists emphasise a focus on marginalised women as these are particularly disadvantaged, yet systematically overlooked (Hansen 2010: 21). A feminist standpoint is 'a superior vision produced by the political conditions and distinctive work of women' (Ruddick 2002: 129). In particular, such a woman's work often comes back to mothering, care and nurturing and contributions are, therefore, often referred to as maternalists. Here, I focus on the works of Nancy Chodorow (1978), Carol Gilligan (1982) and, in particular, Sara Ruddick (1989) because such works are arguably most relevant for the development of a feminist standpoint that in my reading have forged a link between motherhood, agency and peace.

Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* is a psychoanalytic study of how and why mothering remains to be seen as a 'natural' fact and why it is 'naturally' linked to women. Chodorow argues that it is because women are the primary caretakers that mothering is reproduced as 'naturally' linked to women. This creates a focus on social relations and care rather than on women's capacity to give birth:

Being a mother, then, is not only bearing a child- it is being a person who socializes and nurtures. It is being a primary parent or caretaker.  
(Chodorow 1978: 11)

With *In a Different Voice* (1982), Carol Gilligan builds on Chodorow and claims that women's experience of interconnection shapes their moral domain and gives rise to a different moral voice:

In the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection. (Gilligan 1982: 173)

Women's ethic of care, moreover, is contrasted to a (male) ethic of justice. Gilligan argues that while an ethic of justice proceeds from the premise of equality and that everyone should be treated the same, an ethic of care rests on the premise of nonviolence and that no one should be hurt (Gilligan 1982: 174). It is this distinctive form of ethics that has been echoed in writings that articulate a female political consciousness grounded in difference and the virtues of women's private sphere, primarily mothering. Amongst such maternalist theorising, Sara Ruddick's *A Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (2002 [1989]) has most clearly emphasised the links between motherhood, agency and peace.

Ruddick argues that there is a peacefulness latent in maternal practice which means that a transformed maternal thinking could make a distinctive contribution to peace politics (Ruddick 2002: 137):

Although mothers are not intrinsically peaceful, maternal practice is a 'natural resource' for peace politics.... A peace-maker's hope is a militarist's fear: that the rhetoric and passion of maternity can turn against the military cause that depends on it. Mothers have supported their boys and their leaders, but in the contradiction of maternal and military aims there is a dangerous source of resistance. (Ruddick 2002: 157)

Ruddick combines a women's politics of resistance, which she defines as identified by three characteristics: its participants are women, they explicitly invoke their culture's symbols of femininity and their purpose is to resist certain practices or policies of their governors, with motherhood and a feminist politics (Ruddick 2002: 222):

Although neither a women's politics of resistance nor a feminist politics is inherently a peace politics, each instructs and strengthens peacemaking. Both politics are intricately connected to mothering, yet each also challenges just those aspects of maternal practice that limit its public, effective peacefulness. Hence separately and, even more, in combination, they transform maternal practice into a work of peace. (Ruddick 2002: 222)

Ruddick argues that by combining motherhood, with a politics of resistance and standpoint feminism, a new political identity can be constructed: the feminist, maternal peacemaker who draws upon the history and traditions of women to create a human-respecting politics of peace (Ruddick 1989: 245). As illustration, Ruddick uses the political resistance of the Madres

(mothers) of Argentina to its military regime and the similar resistance of Chilean women to the Pinochet dictatorship (Ruddick 1989: 225):

These women are the daughters, the heirs, of Kollwitz's *mater dolorosa*.<sup>8</sup> As in Kollwitz's representations, a mother is victimized through the victimization of her children. These women are themselves victims...Yet there is a sense in which, by their active courage, they refuse victimization....The Latin American *mater dolorosa* has learned how to fight as a victim for victims, not by joining the strong, but by resisting them. (Ruddick 1989: 233)

The maternalist position, predominant in Ruddick's work and through the activism of the women's peace movement mentioned above, might be critiqued for expressing biological determinism and essentialism as it tends to link mothering and an ethics of care to (heterosexual) women and 'real' mothers only.<sup>9</sup> However, Ruddick emphasises the distinction between women's biological capacity to give birth and their social work in mothering as she argues that the work of mothering does not require a particular sexual commitment nor that there is any reason why mothering work should be distinctly female:

While most mothering has been and still is undertaken by women, there has always been men who mother...When mothering is construed as gender-free work, birthgiving and mothering appear as two distinct and quite different activities. (Ruddick 2002: xii)

In other words, Ruddick is still critical of women's 'natural' peacefulness:

There is nothing in a woman's genetic makeup of history that prevents her from firing a missile or spraying nerve gas over a sleeping village

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<sup>8</sup> The *Mater Dolorosa* is the 'mother of sorrows' who is 'weeping over the body of her son, nursing survivors, sadly rebuilding her home, reweaving the connections that war has destroyed – as she grieves over her particular loss, she mourns war itself. Where she gives birth and sustains life, his war only hurts and destroys.' The *mater dolorosa* is the 'heroine of maternal peacefulness' (Ruddick 2002: 142).

<sup>9</sup> See Dietz (1985) for a critique of the maternalist position to citizenship.

if she desires this or believes it to be her duty...War is exciting; women, like men, are prey to the excitements of violence and community sacrifice it promises. (Ruddick 2002: 154)

Although distinctly maternal desires and capacities for peacemaking exist, it is through maternal *efforts* to be peaceful rather than an achieved peacefulness that Ruddick finds ‘resources for creating a less violent world’ (Ruddick 2002: 136). Crucially, Ruddick does not argue that women are naturally peaceful in an ideological sense but interested in the *material* political agency of mothers (male or female). The analysis of material agency through motherhood is, as I come back to below, significantly different to how motherhood and agency is explored in this research project.

Today, feminist standpoint theorising and maternalist thinking is echoed in literature on both citizenship and ‘women building peace’. Sanam Naraghi Anderlini’s contribution (2007), for example, explores ‘what they do and why it matters’. Anderlini argues that ‘women bring alternative perspectives and approaches; they can be strong allies in spreading the message of peace, but they also have needs’ (Anderlini 2007: 230). As a policy tool for women’s inclusion in peace processes, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on ‘Women, Peace and Security’ from the year 2000 was a ‘watershed political framework’ (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002: 3) which in addition to acknowledging women’s particular vulnerability to gendered practices of violence also acknowledged that women have different experiences during war and therefore needs to be included in all stages of peacebuilding (UNSC 2000). With UNSCR 1325, women were not only seen as victims of war, but as agents for peace:

Women must be considered and included at every stage and juncture: from analysis to practice, in the early planning and states of any peace process, in the talks about the talks about the talks. This responsibility cannot be left to a lone gender advisor. Rather, consideration of the

differing situations and needs of women and men (i.e. gendered perspectives) must be an integral part of every facet of work by governments and international actors. (Anderlini 2007: 230)

However, some feminists have pointed out that the resolution risks perpetuating the idea of women-as-peacemakers (Pankhurst 2004). Tickner argues that women's political organising with peace is not necessarily a good thing as 'peace is frequently seen as an ideal, and even uninteresting, state with little chance of success in the 'real' world' (Tickner 2002: 337). Thus, the association of women with peace renders both women and peace as idealistic, utopian, and unrealistic and this is profoundly disempowering for both (Tickner 2002: 338). Similarly, Goldstein argues that making peace feminine both masculinises war and draws gender divisions that help soldiers to kill (knowing that they are outside a 'normal' world). Thus, as long as peace remains associated with women, this may reinforce militarised masculinity (Goldstein 2001: 331, 413).

Discussing maternalism and agency, Caron Gentry (2009) distinguishes between different versions of maternalism as 'active', 'passive' and 'twisted' maternalism. The maternal thinking represented by standpoint feminists, in particular by Ruddick, as well as by women's peace activists in Gentry's categorisation constitutes an active maternalist position as it focuses on how real (material) women are concerned with promoting peace and anti-violent policies (mothers for peace). Passive maternalism, on the other hand, refers to situations in which women's gendered role as mother is claimed by the nation, movement or state to symbolise the collectivity. Here, women themselves are not active participants in the conflict. Instead, they are placed by others in nationalist ideology and as such subordinatedly held as an idealised subject (mothers of nations) (Gentry 2009: 238-9). Gentry argues that both active and passive maternalism associates women with nonviolence, but that women only have

agency within active maternalism. I return to passive maternalism in the next section when I discuss agency, war and motherhood.

Whether the contributions discussed in this section find the association of women and the feminine with nonviolence and peace as problematic or not, agency is still defined in material terms and remains associated with peace and nonviolence. As such, this literature fails to acknowledge not only agency as an idea, but also female agency in political violence. Thus, in the next section, I turn to literature that, rather than showing how women's agency has involved working for peace, has engaged with female agency in political violence more specifically.

### 3. AGENCY IN POLITICAL VIOLENCE

In this section, I first discuss literature on how women's heroism and their roles and participation in wars are linked to motherhood. Second, I highlight literature that has problematised women's association with peace and victimhood by explaining how women are actually acting and participating in political violence, directly or indirectly. Here, there is an emphasis on non-state perpetrators of political violence or actors' proscribed violence and agency tends to be defined as political subjectivity. Last, I focus on literature dealing with female agency as soldiers in state-armies.

#### **3.1 Agency, war and motherhood**

As mentioned above, in traditional stories of war it is usually men who are written as heroes and thereby ascribed agency. Gentry argues that both active and passive maternalism link women's political activism with peace and non-violence but that it is only active maternalism that carries with it some agency on the part of the women (Gentry 2009: 236). In contrast to Gentry, I suggest that women are ascribed indirect agency in passive maternalism. Within certain, often nationalist discourses, women are ideologically allowed heroism through their roles as mothers. Instead of showing how individual women act, these contributions focus on ideas, norms and values in the construction of war stories. There is the 'Patriotic Mother' who is the ever-ready womb for war (Cooke 1996). According to this discourse, women serve their nation by 'producing' children/soldiers of the nation. Here, women's heroism is measured in their life-giving capacities since the more children/soldiers a woman gives birth to, the more significant is her heroism. Women have even been awarded medals for giving birth to a large amount of children. For example, in 1993, on the date of the 1389 defeat of the Serbs at Kosovo, Serbian mothers of more than four children were honoured with medals in a ceremony in Pristina by dignitaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Bracewell 1996: 30). In this sense, motherhood functions as a form of 'weapon' since a multi-birthing woman will give life to many new fighters (Brunner 2005: 36).

Another nationalist discourse is the 'Spartan Mother': a woman who raises her son as warrior ready to die for the nation. Here, it is women's social roles as mothers rather than their physiological and quantifiable capacity to give life that writes women as heroines. In this rhetoric, a woman's heroism and patriotism is to urge sons and husbands to fight and thereby foster nationalism and warfare (Elshtain 1995; Varzi 2008). The Spartan Mother is heroic because she sacrifices her sons for the greater good of the nation-state. As mentioned, both these nationalist discourses on women's agency in political violence are versions of what



Gentry refers to as passive maternalism and, as such, traditionalist ideas about gender, agency and war are reinforced rather than challenged.

It also needs to be pointed out that similarly to how women have used traditionalist perceptions of gender roles in their protesting as peace activists, women also frequently utilise existing stereotypes to pursue their political objectives in warfare. Not only are women exploiting their label of innocence in becoming spies and smugglers (Coulter 2008: 63; Alison 2004: 448) but motherhood is also used more directly as a strategy for political violence. In Sri Lanka, Tamil nationalist women have utilised cultural expectations related to their behaviour and dress to gain access to targets as suicide bombers, hiding belt bombs under saris or dresses, as a female Black Tiger combatant did in the 1991 suicide-bomb assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (Alison 2004: 456). In Sierra Leone, women were found smuggling weapons through military checkpoints in bags of women's underwear or hidden on their own or their children's bodies (Coulter 2008: 63-4).<sup>10</sup> As the 'strategy of motherhood' has been seen in various places, Mia Bloom argues that 'feigning pregnancy unites women suicide bombers in places as diverse as Turkey and Sri Lanka' (Bloom 2007: 152).

To complicate the notions of femininity and motherhood, the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) is often disguised under the women's clothing to make her appear as if she is pregnant and thus beyond suspicion or reproach. The advent of women suicide bombers has transformed the revolutionary womb into an exploding one. (Bloom 2007: 143)

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<sup>10</sup> This is nothing new as is illustrated in the film *Battle of Algiers* (1966) where women smuggle weapons through checkpoints. Interestingly, according to Wikipedia, *Battle of Algiers* was Andreas Baader's favourite film.

Claudia Brunner uses bodily metaphors that directly refer to the gendered representation of suicide bombing in general: Virginity, Pregnancy and Motherhood (Brunner 2005: 35). She argues that the question of virginity is prevalent in many media accounts where expressions such as ‘daughter of Palestine’, ‘Palestine’s bride’ and the like refer to youth and therefore innocence within the martyrdom operations that can just as easily be described as murder. Furthermore, the picture of the pregnant woman is both cited in reports to illustrate the continuing humiliation of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints, but it also illustrates the power over the bodies of women and children as the Palestinian nation is hindered in giving birth to itself on a symbolic level (Brunner 2005: 36). Again, this echoes passive maternalism (mothers of nations).

This group of contributions to feminist IR scholarship have problematised ideas regarding female agency in political violence through maternalism and highlighted how motherhood has been used as a discursive strategy within nationalist ideologies, as well as how individual women have faked motherhood as a strategy for political violence. In combination, these contributions show that maternalism is not only used in the association of women and peace, but is also very much present in discourses of political violence. This is also indicated in the title of Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry’s book published in 2007, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, which I discuss further in the following sections.

### **3.2 Agents of political violence**

The official recognition and acknowledgement of women’s participation in war is very recent, but the presence and participation of women in war is neither unusual nor new (Cooke 1996: 104; Coulter 2008: 56) as ‘female bellicosity and the feminine warring imagination have a

long and distinguished past' (Bourke 1999: 311-2).<sup>11</sup> As mentioned above, the boundary between being a victim and a perpetrator of political violence is often blurred. In addition, even though women have traditionally been excluded from war as soldiers, they have been an integral part of the killing process in a number of other ways. Prominent examples of women who have led their people in war are Joan of Arc, Queen Isabella of Spain, Queen Elizabeth of England, Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir and Indira Ghandi (Goldstein 2001). Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, former Rwandan Minister for Family and Women's Affairs, was the first woman ever to be charged with genocide in an international court (the ICTR). She was charged with organising massacres and encouraging sexual violence against Tutsis (Alison 2007: 89). Lynne Segal (2008) and Joshua Goldstein (2001) have illuminated women's roles as supporters of the military culture, their devotion to men in uniform and their disrespect for those who refuse to fight. According to Segal, the majority of women have supported the wars their leaders have waged (Segal 2008: 22). Women have also been participating in the genocide in Sudan by singing songs to stir up racial hatred during attacks and celebrate the humiliation of their enemies (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 146) and women's wings of Hindu extremist organisation have urged men to prove their manhood by killing and raping Muslim women (Cockburn 2010: 144). Miranda Alison has shown how in Northern Ireland it was women who had central responsibility for transporting, moving, hiding, cleaning and storing weapons and explosive materials as they were much less likely to be stopped and searched (Alison 2004: 457). Bracewell has discussed groups of mothers and widows (first Serbs, later Croats) who gathered to block the aid convoys sent to the besieged Bosnian towns of Srebrenica and Mostar. Bracewell argues these women used their role as grieving mothers to

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<sup>11</sup> See Jones (2005) for a history of women warriors.

legitimate their protests and acted, consciously or not, in the interests of the nationalist leaders (Bracewell 1996: 30).

These contributions to feminist IR literature on female agency in political violence have illuminated how individual women have acted and indirectly contributed to warfare in order to critique gendered assumptions of women as ‘naturally’ passive and peaceful. Women are actually actively participating in most current conflicts (Utas 2005: 405). Still, even though we know that although they are a minority, many women of diverse cultural backgrounds express their personal and political dissatisfaction by violent means (Alison 2007), the perception of fighters/rebels/soldiers as male remains, and gendered ideas of war and peace continue (Coulter 2008: 69). Moreover, because of such gendered stereotypes, Sjoberg and Gentry argue, women who commit acts of violence in defiance of national or international law are not seen as criminals, warriors or terrorists, but as *women criminals*, *women warriors* or *women terrorists* (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 7). Women’s violence is often discussed in terms of violent women’s gender: *women* are not supposed to be violent (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 2). Similarly, Alison remarks that ‘the mere fact that it is necessary to specify “female combatants” indicates their historical rarity and symbolic position as unconventional figures’ and Elshtain argues that ‘the woman fighter is, for us, an identity *in extremis*, not an expectation’ (Alison 2004: 447; Elshtain 1995: 173).

In addition, feminist contributions have also argued that female agency in political violence is gendered because individual women’s motivations are explained in gendered terms. Historian Joanna Burke argues that when women did kill, their ability to do so was explained under one of two mutually exclusive headings: psychosexual confusion or maternal instincts (Bourke 1999: 318). Other explanations for why women engage in violence in general include:

elevated levels of testosterone, traumatic events in childhood and excessive feminism or lesbianism (Eager 2008: 3). Hence, because women soldiers either lacked femininity or possessed too much of the maternal impulse, they were seen as uncontrollable, more ferocious and more deceitful than their male counterparts, beliefs that were endorsed and encouraged in popular fiction (Bourke 1999: 340).<sup>12</sup> Elshtain argues that the violence of female groups is a sign that signifies formlessness, dis-order, breakdown, mis-rule and often appears as an out-of-control mob, a crowd, a food riot, usually of lower-class composition:

Not being politically constituted, women are not politically accountable. Male violence could be moralized as a structured activity- war- and thus be depersonalized and idealized. Female violence, however, brooked no good. It was overpersonalized and vindictive. (Elshtain 1995: 169)

Another common representation of women's violence is that women either are taking more pleasure in the bloodshed than male combatants (Bourke 1999: 312), or are more aggressive than male soldiers (Eager 2008). For example, stories of the brutality of rebel women became a popular theme during and after the war in Sierra Leone (Coulter 2008: 59). Female fighters have often been regarded by the civilian population as monsters, barbarians and frequently as more cold blooded than male rebels (Coulter 2008: 57). Coulter argues that because notions of women's and men's gendered roles in war and conflict persists, to transcend what is considered acceptable feminine or masculine behaviour in times of war and conflict can be costly. Men who refuse to fight are often ridiculed, jailed, or even killed for their cowardice or lack of manliness, whereas women who oppose female stereotypes in war often are regarded as deviant or unnatural (Coulter 2008: 63). Therefore, Coulter argues, the notion of a

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, a fascination with female combatants developed as representations in popular culture such as novels, short stories, magazine articles and autobiographies increased (the popular press highlighted feminine fondness for the gun) (Bourke 1999: 312).

militarised masculinity has consequences for how female combatants are interpreted. In this way, the idea that female combatants are more evil and vicious than men is often attributed by researchers to female fighters' transgression of acceptable female behaviour (Coulter 2008: 63). Similarly, Alison explains that in Sri Lanka, female Tamil Tigers have a fearsome reputation, and it is often said that they are more violent and frightening than male members. Some suggest this is because female soldiers have to be tougher, more ruthless and macho and less sympathetic in order to compete for status and recognition in a traditional patriarchal context, while others suggest it may only be representations of violence that differs. Bourke points out that there is no evidence that female combatants actually were more liable to play dirty (Bourke 1999: 341) and Alison suggests that it is because women's involvement in violence remains more shocking and disturbing than men's involvement that women's violence is represented as more aggressive (Alison 2004: 457). This indicates an 'underlying discomfort with such a challenge to gendered expectations that may be widely cross-cultural' (Alison 2004: 462).

When it comes to motivations for actors' involvement in violence, women's violence is represented differently than men's violence even though individuals from both genders are motivated by both strategy and personal politicisation. Gentry explains:

As the studies move away from the general self-martyr (male) into analyzing the female self-martyr, reasons behind the person's (woman's) actions begin to change. (Gentry 2009: 241)

In media representations and some academic literature, women's motivations for turning violent are explained in personal rather than political terms. Bloom argues that women are fulfilling the ultimate patriarchal ideal of motherhood by giving up her body for the collective, the nation (Bloom 2007: 165):

According to Hindu faith, once a woman is raped she cannot get married nor have children. Fighting for Tamil freedom might have been the only way for such a woman to redeem herself. The idea of sacrifice is ingrained in Tamil culture. Women are taught from an early age to subordinate themselves to the needs or desires of men. The self-sacrifice of the female bombers is almost an extension of the idea of motherhood in the Tamil culture. (Bloom 2007: 160)

Similarly, journalist Barbara Victor depicts Palestinian female suicide bombers as becoming perpetrators of political violence due to feminine shortcomings such as being childless, divorced or adulterous (Victor 2004). Eager argues that by portraying female suicide bombers as influenced by family members or grief-stricken over the death of a relative or a friend, these women fulfil the ultimate maternal-sacrificial code in that they want to give their own life on behalf of others' pain, grief or suffering (Eager 2008: 187). Thus, even though violent men are portrayed as rationally or logically motivated, violent women are usually not depicted as rational actors (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 13). This is the case even though females committing suicide bombings tend to be older and better educated than males (Toles Parkin 2004: 84), and even if the perpetrators' own video-recorded martyrdom statements focus on their political ambitions (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 120). Rarely are these women portrayed as committing a suicide attack due to political motivations (Eager 2008: 187). Frances Hasso offers a detailed account of how representations by and deployments of the four Palestinian women who committed suicide attacks in 2002 functioned to both reproduce and undermine gender-sexual norms (Hasso 2005: 44). Alison shows that like male combatants, female combatants in nationalist conflicts view themselves as fighting to protect the political, cultural, economic and military security of their nation, community or family (Alison 2004: 458). Jessica West argues that the women referred to as 'black widows' in Chechnya are described as desperate and revenge-seeking wives and sisters of Chechen fighters who have

been killed. West argues that their actions have been represented as a result of victimisation rather than agency (West 2004: 1).

Terrorism is a political act, yet no one has stopped to ask what women's political goals are. It is just assumed that they seek personal revenge. Practically, by treating women as instruments rather than as agents of war, their political goals are likely to be overlooked in any future negotiations, when their presence is no longer needed. (West 2004: 9)

Gentry argues that when research focuses on women specifically, a relational need to belong and the participation of family and friends is emphasised. This is why women's participation is seen as based solely upon belonging, familial and friendship ties and nurturing, and less about her political motivations and beliefs. Gentry argues that this gendering both subordinates woman's agency and echoes the maternalist position (Gentry 2009: 240). Gentry refers to the writing of politically violent women in this way as 'twisted maternalism' since it continues to objectify women and deny them any agency (Gentry 2009: 242).

In 2004, thousands of photos seemingly depicting US soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners were made available to the media resulting in what is commonly referred to as the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. The fact that several of the alleged torturers were women resulted in much media debate and later academic publications on female agency in political violence. In addition, since two of my empirical cases are stories from this scandal, such feminist contributions speak directly to this research project.

The representation of women soldiers were quite dramatic and most people found them utterly shocking. But we might also say that they provided the most powerful evidence of what the most interesting feminist analyses have tried to explain: that there is a difference



between the body gendered as female and the set of discourses and ideologies that inform the sex/gender system. (Davies 2007: 25)

The Abu Ghraib debacle gave new life to doubts not only about whether women ought to be performing dangerous military duties, but about whether they should be part of the armed forces at all. (Hillman 2007: 112)

Melanie Richter-Montpetit argues that the violences shown in the Abu Ghraib pictures follow a pre-constructed heterosexed, racialised and gendered script grounded in colonial desires and practices constituting the 'war on terror' (Richter-Montpetit 2007: 39). Melisa Brittain argues that there is a virgin/whore dichotomy contained within the category of white femininity in the West which means that the white woman can signify as either victim-of-rape-in-need-of-rescue or depraved-villain-in-need-of-reform. Both significations co-opt the category of white femininity as a way of relieving white masculinity from the burden of signifying as anything but a just and civilising force (Brittain 2006: 92). Discussing Lynndie England's agency, Brittain suggests that given the abusive conditions under which women in the military must operate it is quite possible that England negotiated this treacherous ground by blindly following orders, or by acting as just one of the boys. However, the fact that she is not one of the boys is what made her particularly useful in the systematic humiliation of Iraqi men. It also made her a convenient scapegoat for the Bush administration and facilitated the use of her as a symbol of US corruption and depravity (Brittain 2006: 90). Sjoberg argues that during her trials England was denied agency when she was not allowed the right to plead guilty because a court determined that she 'could have been so manipulated by her boyfriend as to have lost her sense of right and wrong' (Sjoberg 2007: 96). Sjoberg and Gentry argue that the female soldiers in the Abu Ghraib scandal have committed a triple transgression: against the laws of war, against their femininity and against the military's prescribed roles for

military women (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 23). Alison argues that the much greater public shock in reaction to a woman's involvement in such a sexual torture of male prisoners than to her male comrades' involvement indicates the continued naturalisation of men as perpetrators of sexual crimes and the naturalisation of women as non-aggressive- even when they are soldiers (Alison 2007: 76).

Both Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) and Eager (2008) argue that women who participate in violence that is not endorsed by state governments and is therefore committed outside exceptional circumstances are described as aberrant and 'less than a woman' and as less than humans (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 22; Eager 2008: 3). Sjoberg and Gentry, whose contribution is closest to this research project in content, argue that women engaged in proscribed violence are often portrayed either as 'mothers', women who are fulfilling their biological destinies; as 'monsters', women who are pathologically damaged and are therefore drawn to violence; or as 'whores', women whose violence is inspired by sexual dependence and depravity. Each narrative has gendered assumptions about what is appropriate female behaviour. The mother narratives describe women's violence as a need to belong, a need to nurture, and a way of taking care of and being loyal to men; it is motherhood gone awry (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 30-36). The monster narrative eliminates rational behaviour, ideological motivation and culpability from women engaged in political violence. Instead, here violent women are described as insane, in denial of their femininity, no longer women or human (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 36-41). The whore narratives blame women's violence on the evils of female sexuality at its most intense or its most vulnerable (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 41-49). Sjoberg and Gentry argue that because women who commit violence are most often perceived of as having acted outside of a prescribed gender role, their agency as perpetrators of violence represent inappropriate femininity. Furthermore, when women's

violent practices are captured in fantasies which reify gender stereotypes and subordination, women's agency is denied (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 5). While I welcome the analysis of motherhood in both Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) and Gentry (2010), motherhood is limited to one, out of three, different narratives used in order to deny women agency in political violence. As I explain in greater detail in the conclusion, this research project offers something different as it also explores how motherhood enables female agency in political violence.

The contributions discussed in this section have shown how gendered assumptions influence the portrayal of female perpetrators of political violence and thereby illustrate how female agency in political violence is denied. As such, these contributions do not analyse how female agency in political violence is enabled. In addition, in these contributions the actors portrayed tend to be non-state actors or women who are perpetrators of proscribed violence. Thus, I refer to this literature as engaging with illegitimate agency. However, as mentioned above, and in more detail in Chapter 2, I define agency in political violence as the *capacity* to kill in order to capture the idea of killing. As a result, the context is less important and what I refer to as legitimate agency also needs to be included. Within a Western culture, legitimate agency in political violence is closely linked to the (state) military, thus, I now continue with exploring literature on gender, agency and the military.

### **3.3 Gender, agency and the military**

Women have only been allowed into military service in significant numbers in times of extreme need in war (Goldstein 2001: 93). Hence, historically, women who participated in combat usually did so disguised as men (Bourke 1999: 311). Elshtain calls women who

reverse cultural expectations by serving in militaries ‘the Ferocious Few’ (Elshtain 1995). The arguments against women’s inclusion have been both physically, that women lacked upper body strength and possessed less stamina and endurance, and psychologically, that women were said to lack the aggressiveness of men and to have lower fear thresholds (Bourke 1999: 333). According to Gerhard Kümmel, arguments for the exclusion are that women might be defined as weakening or polluting especially in a combat situation; that feminine skills or aptitudes for caring and nurturing will be diminished through such participations; and that women might not be able to cope with the rigors and deprivations of war and training. Other major concerns have been whether men will obey women officers and whether men will endanger themselves by protecting women in combat situations (Kümmel 2002: 631). Bourke argues that the reason why the military establishment was historically opposed to allowing women to carry arms was because they were ‘fearful of the chaos that might result from the disruption of traditional gender roles and anxious lest the unleashing of female bellicosity would morally disenfranchise both sexes’ (Bourke 1999: 344). It was feared that the presence of women at the frontlines would be demoralising for men: it would disrupt processes of bonding and destroy a self-consciously ‘masculine’ warrior ethic. Combat was the ultimate signifier of manliness and bringing women in would symbolically castrate the armed forces (Bourke 1999: 338). Similarly, Kümmel argues that all these concerns are in fact a concern with the overall symbolic order, the apparent loosening of boundaries between women and men, and the weakening of the links between nation, the military and gendered identities (Kümmel 2002: 631). The Israeli military historian Martin Van Creveld has been one of the most outspoken critics of women’s inclusion in the military. He maintains that the inclusion of female soldiers feminises and, therefore, weakens the military, which will lead to its decline, leaving the armed forces progressively more incapable of doing what they were

invented for (Van Creveld 2000). It seems the most concrete danger from the feminisation of the military derives from the physical presence of female bodies.

Historically, the Army has been a masculinist organisation defined in terms of its masculinities and in opposition to women and the feminine (Woodward and Winter 2006: 60) with the implication that a soldier has to learn to 'deny all that is feminine and soft in himself' (Goldstein 2001: 266). Also, with today's legislation against discriminating women based on their sex, the exemption of women from combat has to be made along the lines of combat effectiveness rather than gender. As a result, the debate shifted from the principal question of whether or not to include women in the military towards the issue of women in combat forces (Kümmel 2002: 621). In spite of the military opening up to women soldiers, women are still excluded from certain positions on the basis of their sex. In 2002, no Western armed forces allowed women to serve in Special Forces (Kümmel 2002: 624).

Woodward and Winter have analysed the 2002 Ministry of Defence report published on gender in the armed forces and the exclusion of women in direct combat positions. The argument made in the report is that women are excluded because of 'the risks to the cohesion of small teams under extreme and violent conditions of close combat' (MoD 2002). Woodward and Winter argue that women are excluded because of assumptions about their qualities as women. They argue that gender difference is constructed as essentialist whereas other types of differences for example due to race or ethnicity are constructed as social in origin and, thus, ultimately surmountable by the fighting unit (Woodward and Winter 2006: 57).

Another 'event' from the 'war on terror' that generated much debate in mass media, as well as being a topic for academic publications, was the construction of US soldier Jessica Lynch as

the war in Iraq's first heroine. Using the discourse of masculinist protection and the myth of sacrifice, Véronique Pin-Fat and Maria Stern argue that Lynch, as a female prisoner of war, could not be sacrificed while in captivity because she, as a woman, symbolically stands for what the military traditionally is protecting. Lynch is that for which the soldier sacrifices and, therefore, cannot be sacrificed herself (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005: 42). The US military, they argue, required a rescued Jessica Lynch and the notion of femininity she represents in order to produce and sustain fighters who are willing to die for their country. Therefore, in this context, women like Jessica Lynch cannot be sacrificed; they are the object, not the subject, of sacrifice (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005: 42, 44).

Pin-Fat and Stern argue that the masculinity of the military, indeed the existential identity of the military as part of war, relies on its constitutive feminine other. The very existence of women's bodies within the space of the military thus threatens both the identity of the military and its capacity to execute its duties. Furthermore, Pin-Fat and Stern argue that gender becomes subsumed under sex and is naturalised as biological in this framework. These explanations rest on essentialist arguments about women, where female difference is interpreted as disruptive to the cohesion by its very presence (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005: 31). Therefore, 'equality' within the military is doomed to fail given that female bodies cannot become male (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005: 32). Similarly, Sjolander and Trevenen argue that media portraits of Jessica Lynch demonstrate how little the simple inclusion of women in the military acts to disrupt sexist systems of power and meaning (Sjolander and Trevenen 2010: 158). They argue that two competing constructions of Lynch, as the 'Rambette' and the

‘Damsel in Distress’, supported and reinforced a conception of gender that underlies military, imperial and national projects and systems of meaning:<sup>13</sup>

The ‘Rambette’ narrative initially portrayed her as a valiant and resilient warrior, willing to shoot to the death to defend her country and fellow soldiers. The ‘Damsel in Distress’ narrative exaggerated descriptions of her rescue as well as provided evidence of her femininity, her heterosexuality, her white Americanness and her youthfulness. (Sjolander and Trevenen 2010: 168)

Instead of challenging traditional gender norms by serving in the military, Lynch served to re-order and discipline conceptions of femininity (Sjolander and Trevenen 2010: 159, 172-3). Thus, the re-assimilation of Jessica Lynch into a traditional vision of feminine virtue (as opposed to a deviant feminist vision of a female warrior) enabled a situation in which ‘everyone appears to be performing gender as they should’, thus alleviating the disruption initially provided by a female soldier (Sjolander and Trevenen 2010: 172). Referring to former US soldier, Kayla Williams, Cynthia Cockburn reflects on the inclusion of women in the military:<sup>14</sup>

Aspiring to equality through military service alongside men, Kayla Williams emerged from the experience reduced in her own eyes to ‘a slut’- which is how her male comrades had perceived and treated her. It is not the same thing to be a woman soldier as a man soldier, nor is it seen as one. (Cockburn 2010: 145)

Regarding the Jessica Lynch story, scholars such as Kumar (2004), Brittain (2006) and Sjoberg (2007) have revealed that the focus on Lynch at the time excluded representations of

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<sup>13</sup> The rescue of Jessica Lynch was made with references to popular culture as it was referred to as an action movie. The US special task force filmed the entire rescue (Sjolander and Trevenen 2010: 164).

<sup>14</sup> See Williams (2006) and Holmstedt (2007) for female soldiers’ own accounts of serving as soldiers in the military.

the other two female soldiers involved in the incident, Shoshana Johnson (African-American) and Lori Piestewa (Native-American). These untold stories both expose the racial aspect of what is appropriate femininity as well as that their agency in the incident is denied. Brittain argues that within the discourse of white supremacy, neither Johnson nor Piestewa could figure as all-American heroines:

As ‘women of color’, they do not fit into the category of femininity worth saving. Unlike Jessica Lynch, they cannot signify as vulnerable to the threat of inter-racial rape, and they could never be made to stand in for the violation of the US by a foreign male threat. (Brittain 2006: 83)

Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel argue that the political purpose of official war stories such as the one associated with Jessica Lynch is to camouflage the interests, agendas, policies, and politics that underpin the war in order to legitimise and gain consent for the ‘war on terror’ (Hunt and Rygiel 2006: 4). Melisa Brittain argues that the writing of Jessica Lynch as a modern-day heroine is an example of how colonial memory and fear of the Other have been effectively evoked to rally support for Bush’s ‘war on terror’ (Brittain 2006: 74). For example, by suggesting Lynch was anally raped, authors reproduce Arab masculinity as not only sexually violent, but also ‘unnatural’ and ‘perverse’ (Brittain 2006: 83). Brittain notes that the Lynch story appeared when rising Iraqi resistance against the occupation became impossible for Pentagon to either ignore or hide. This moment of crisis was thus managed by creating a narrative of vulnerable white femininity and Arab hypermasculinity to divert attention away from their loss of control (Brittain 2006: 81). Kumar, furthermore, suggests that Lynch was used by the military to enable a controversial war being talked about in emotional rather than rational language, i.e. as war propaganda (Kumar 2004).



In addition, Cooke argues that female soldiers threaten to devalue the sacrifice made by their male counterparts, soldiers are no longer 'boys whom we are reluctantly but proudly prepared to sacrifice', but women and men who are above all parents and spouses who saw the military a chance for employment and even for social mobility (Cooke 1996: 33). Attempts at sustaining boundaries between the military and civilian life, men and women, war and peace, and so on, Pin-Fat and Stern argue, reveal how these boundaries rely on clear coding of masculinity and femininity and how the taken for granted identity of military and the boundaries upon which it rests are unsettled by the inclusion of the feminine (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005: 34). However, they also argue the identity of the military is, by necessity, inherently unstable, incomplete, and subject to change (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005: 32, 35).

Feminist contributions in this section have shown that although women are technically included, the inclusion process has paid little attention to the discursive and performative elements of gender subordination (Butler 1993; 2006). As a result, the discursive structures of gender subordination are preserved even in an increasingly gender-integrated international political arena (McNay 2000). With the inclusion of female soldiers and combatants, gender stereotypes and subordinations have changed shape and become less visible, but still very much exists (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 3). Moreover, while contributions in this section have focused on legitimate agency in the form of state-based political violence, they tend to focus on how female agency is denied and not how it is enabled. In particular, the way in which heroism and heroines, as agents of political violence, are constructed is lacking within feminist IR, especially with regards to motherhood.

#### 4. CONCLUSION: Filling in the gaps

In this chapter, I have mapped the feminist IR literature to which this research project aims to make a contribution to knowledge. I started by discussing contributions on gender, agency and war, broadly defined, focusing on two implications of the gendered nature of war: how women have traditionally been seen as victims of war and the association of women with nonviolence and peace, in particular through motherhood. I explored standpoint feminist literature on an ethics of care and maternalist thinking in order to draw out the links between motherhood, agency and peace in gendered peace stories. In the second section, I examined literature on female agency in political violence more specifically. I showed how women's heroism in warfare and indirect participation has been linked to women's potential role as mothers. I used literature which has highlighted individual women's participation and thereby agency in warfare and, last, I discussed literature on individual soldiers' agency within the military as well as gendered implications of the military system in general. In this concluding section, I highlight five main ways in which this research project differs from, and therefore aims to fill a gap within, the existing feminist IR literature on gender, agency and political violence. Combined, these contributions constitute a poststructuralist account of female agency in political violence. Independently, this relates to questions regarding what to analyse (visual and textual representations in mass culture), what level to analyse (the domestic level), as well as how agency in political violence is defined.

First, within a 'war on terror' context, much feminist IR literature has dealt with how gendered systems of meaning and representation have enabled, justified or promoted the wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq. However, I argue it is equally relevant to ask how representations of the 'war on terror' have reinforced certain gender norms at the domestic

level, within our societies. Caron Gentry argues that ‘the manufacturing of women’s political activism as part of their biological function as mothers tells the reader more about the story-teller (the one who manufactures the narrative about women’s proscribed violence) and less about women’s agency’ (Gentry 2009: 247). In contrast, I argue that the two are intimately linked. In order to answer how gender norms have been reinforced during the ‘war on terror’ and think differently about gender, agency and political violence, I argue that it is crucial to look to the story-teller(s) and in that way trace how knowledge-making institutions and practices construct meanings, subjectivities and knowledges (Zalewski 2000: 123). By this I mean we need to focus on *representations* of female agency in political violence. This is because representations of agency tell us something about how female agency in political violence is understood in our societies. This research project is not about how individual female perpetrators of political violence act and whether their material agency is denied or not. I do not analyse political subjectivity. Instead, this project explores the workings of power inherent in the way in which female agents of political violence are written as subjects/objects within various discursive practices. Hence, this research makes an original contribution to the existing literature by exploring how representations of female agency in political violence have reinforced certain gendered norms within a Western cultural context.

Following my theoretical and methodological framework, there is also no need to distinguish between different forms of representations. Most of the existing literature, excludes visual imagery in representations of gender, agency and violence.<sup>15</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry (2007), for example, only discuss narratives. In comparison, my contribution has a more complex, less static, understanding of representations. Also, whilst their argument about three different narratives (mother, monster, whore) in representations of female agency in political violence,

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<sup>15</sup> An exemption is Hasso (2005) who includes Palestinian suicide bombers’ video messages in her analysis.

can help us to understand how female perpetrators of violence are being portrayed, this research aims to tackle underlying ideas about gender, agency and violence supporting such representations. As such, this research project does not only explore how female agency in political violence is denied through motherhood but also how female agency in political violence is enabled through motherhood. This research project is about implications and meanings of certain representations and since, according to Barthes, anything that has meaning has the potential to become mythical, popular culture has just as much to tell us about understandings of female agency in political violence as do more traditional sources of data. Following scholars such as Rob Walker (1992), Cynthia Weber (2005), Jutta Weldes (1999; 2003) and Roland Bleiker (2001), this research project makes an original contribution to the existing literature on gender, agency and political violence by including empirical cases from popular culture and by analysing visual representations.

In addition, when I discuss agency in political violence, I use a broader definition of both agency and political violence. As mentioned above, due to my theoretical framework, I analyse representations of agency held by subject positions in discursive structures. I do not analyse whether or not individuals have ‘real’ agency through the idea of political subjectivity. This is an important distinction that a poststructuralist account of female agency in political violence offers. Moreover, valuable contributions such as, for example, Sjoberg and Gentry are limiting female agency to women’s proscribed violence by which they mean ‘violence that is denounced, condemned or prohibited by the laws of states or the laws between states’ (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 11). In contrast, I define political violence as ‘*capacity to kill*’ because with this definition both female soldiers’ and female “terrorists” agency, both legitimate and illegitimate agency, are included. The reason for this theoretical move is not only that it is a capacity to kill that unites these two types of actors, but it is also

the only way in which it is possible to capture the *idea* of women killing. I argue it is the idea of women killing, the capacity to kill, not the context, that is most provoking, shocking and, in the end, at odds and clashing with the Myth of Motherhood which captures the *capacity* to give life. I argue that because of women's assumed capacity to give life, they cannot 'naturally' take life. Seemingly, femininity, with which women are 'naturally' associated, and killing are juxtaposed. This creates not only a tension in representations of female agency in political violence, but also establishes the boundary between 'natural'/appropriate and 'unnatural'/inappropriate femininity. In this sense, killing is the ultimate 'unnatural' feminine behaviour. Hence, I use a broader definition of agency in political violence to facilitate making the Myth of Motherhood visible/conscious.

To sum up, this research project offers a nuanced understanding of gender, agency and political violence by analysing the meaning of representations of female agency in political violence in a domestic 'war on terror' culture; by analysing visual representations; by including popular culture as data for analysis; by analysing representations of agency rather than 'real' agency held by individuals; and last, by defining agency in political violence as the capacity to kill in order to capture the idea of killing. Combined, these contributions constitute a poststructuralist account of female agency in political violence.

## PLOT SYNOPSIS: Overview empirical cases

FAYE TURNEY	
Case description	Faye Turney was one of 15 British sailors and marines who were held hostage in Iran for two weeks in 2007. When the <i>Sun</i> revealed that the only woman involved was also a mother, both British media and the Iranian government focused their attention on Turney. In the UK, a debate regarding women's roles in the military service was ignited. The captives were shown on Iranian television eating and spending time together. After two weeks, the captive were dressed in suits, taken to see the President, pardoned and released. They arrived in the UK with 'goody-bags' from the Iranian President. The Ministry of Defence allowed the members of the group to sell their story to the media. Most of the media focus during and after the hostage crisis was on Turney who subsequently was offered £100,000 for an interview with the <i>Sun</i> and ITV news.
Timeline	April and May 2007

LYNN DIE ENGLAND	
Case description	Lynndie England was one of three female army personnel in a small group of US military police officers who were punished for the Abu Ghraib scandal. England is the most well-known of the people involved and the most published and written about. England was a desk-clerk whose job was to log prisoners arriving at Abu Ghraib but because of her relationship with Charles Graner, one of the MP's tasked with 'preparing' prisoners for interrogations by military intelligence officers during the night shifts, England was present too. At the time of the revealing of the abuse and during her trials, England was pregnant with Graner's child. England pleaded guilty in her first trial but the deal was thrown out after Graner stated that she was only following orders by superiors. In her second trial, England was sentenced to three years in prison for 'posing' in photos, the third highest sentence.
Timeline	2004-2005
Key events	The initial media coverage when the first photos became public, England's two trials, as well as her pregnancy.

JANIS KARPINSKI	
Case description	Janis Karpinski was in charge of all military police officers, charged with the task of guarding prisoners all over Iraq. Various military investigations have shown that the chain of command was blurred as Abu Ghraib prison itself was transferred to Military Intelligence because it was the only prison where interrogations were taking place. In effect, it meant that Janis Karpinski was no longer in charge of Abu Ghraib, but at the same time her soldiers were working in that facility. In the media representations, Janis Karpinski is referred to as the highest officer to be punished for the scandal. However, she was not punished for involvement in any abuse, but for weak leadership and a false shoplifting charge that she failed to mention before she was promoted to General. She remains the only General ever to have been demoted in the US Army (Karpinski, <i>Signal City</i> , 13/11/2005).
Timeline	2004

BAADER-MEINHOF COMPLEX	2008 (Based on a book by Stefan Aust that was re-launched in 2006).
Main characters	Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin, Andreas Baader.
Case description	<i>The Baader-Meinhof Complex</i> is a German film about the German terrorist organisation Red Army Faction (RAF) and their activities in the 1970s. The narrative of the film particularly follows Meinhof's transformation from an outspoken journalist to a perpetrator and instigator of political violence. The group's aim is to defeat US imperialism and many of their attacks are, thus, targeting US interests. After West Germany declared a 'war on terror', most RAF members were either killed or arrested within a couple of years. The trials of Meinhof, Baader and Ensslin went on for several years and during this time the prisoners were mostly held in isolation. The relationship between Meinhof on the one hand and Baader and Ensslin on the other was estranged and Meinhof, who never saw the end of the trials, committed suicide in prison. Some time after, when a new group of members failed a hijacking operation, Baader, Ensslin and two other RAF members also chose to commit suicide (one woman survived).

BRITZ	2007
Main characters	Nasima, Sohail, Jude, Sabia
Case description	<i>Britz</i> is a two-part television drama shown in 2007 on Channel 4 about a brother and a sister, Sohail and Nasima, and their different personal experiences as British Muslims during increasing tensions between counter-terrorism laws and civil liberties in a post-‘9/11’ and ‘7/7’ ‘war on terror’ society. In the UK, Nasima becomes radicalised after her best friend, Sabia, commits suicide after being mistreated by police, and because she is not allowed to be with her secret boyfriend. Nasima becomes a suicide bomber while Sohail works for MI5 and counter-terrorism. In the last part, ‘Nasima’s story’, we follow the lead female character, Nasima, and her transformation into a suicide bomber. She travels to Pakistan to train as a fighter before she returns to London and makes the last preparations. Just before Nasima is about to push the button and ignite her bomb, which she is wearing under a maternity suit, Sohail reaches for her, hugs her and asks her not to do it. Nasima pushes the button and the screen goes white.

FEMALE AGENTS	2008
Main characters	Louise, Jeanne, Suzy, Gaelle, Pierre, Heindrich, Buckmaster.
Case description	<i>Female Agents</i> is a French film inspired by the women who fought as agents during the Second World War when France was occupied by Germany. The film follows a group of four female agents who are put together by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE): Louise, Jeanne, Gaelle and Suzy. Louise’s brother Pierre leads to group in their mission to rescue a British geologist from a hospital in Normandy who had taken samples from the beaches in preparation for D-day. After their first successful mission, Pierre orders the agents to Paris in order to kill an influential Nazi officer, Heindrich. In Paris, all agents but Jeanne are soon arrested or killed. Gaelle commits suicide in prison, Suzy is shot and killed by Heindrich, her former fiancé, and Louise is tortured while in captivity. Louise is, however, rescued by Jeanne. Louise finally manages to kill Heindrich thanks to Jeanne who diverts attention to herself and subsequently is arrested and hanged. Louise is the only one amongst the group of female agents who survives the war.



## CAST: Alphabetical list of characters

**Adam-** Adam is Faye Turney's husband.

**Andreas Baader-** Baader is one of the main characters in *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*. He is in a relationship with Gudrun Ensslin.

**Arthur Batchelor-** Batchelor is the youngest of the sailors and marines held hostage in Iran in 2007. He was the only other member of the group besides Faye Turney to sell his story to the newspapers.

**Buckmaster-** Buckmaster is a character in *Female Agents*, the head of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) set up by Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

**Dutschke-** Rudi Dutschke is a character in the *Baader-Meinhof Complex*. He is a union leader and friend of Ulrike Meinhof's who gets shot. The shooting of Dutschke triggers Ulrike Meinhof's radicalisation.

**Faye-** Faye Turney is one of my 'real' cases. She was one of 15 sailors and marines who were captured and held hostage for two weeks in Iran in 2007. Faye Turney was the only woman amongst the group and she was also a mother.

**Gaelle-** Gaelle is one of the agents in *Female Agents*. She is an explosive expert.

**Gudrun-** Gudrun Ensslin is one of the main characters in the *Baader-Meinhof Complex*. She is represented as the real leader of the group. Gudrun Ensslin is in a relationship with Andreas Baader.

**Heindrich-** Heindrich is one of the main characters in *Female Agents*. He is the film's 'bad guy', a Nazi Officer who is close to finding out about plans regarding the British D-Day invasion. He was also engaged with Suzy before war broke out. (The characters of Andreas Baader in *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* and Heindrich in *Female Agents* are played by the same actor.)

**Janis-** Janis Karpinski is one of the 'real' cases. She was in charge of the 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion tasked with conducting prisoner of war operations in Iraq in 2003. Initially, Karpinski was the highest ranking officer to be punished, although she was cleared from involvement in abuse. She is the first general in US history to have been demoted.

**Jeanne-** Jeanne is a character in *Female Agents*. She is a prostitute and in jail for having killed a man when Louise and Pierre approach her. Jeanne is portrayed as the real heroine of the film.

**Jude-** Jude is a character in *Britz*. He is Nasima's secret boyfriend.

**Louise-** Louise is the main character in *Female Agents*. She is Pierre's sister and the leader of the group of female agents. Early in the film she discovers she is pregnant with her late husband's child.

**Lynndie-** Lynndie England is one of the 'real' cases. She was depicted in the photos from the Abu Ghraib scandal. She was the most published and written about even though she was just a desk clerk and not even a military police officer. She received the third longest penalty, three years, for 'posing' in pictures.

**Molly-** Molly is Faye Turney's daughter. The focus on Faye Turney's motherhood meant that there was also much media focus on Molly, three years old at the time.

**Nasima-** Nasima is one of the main characters in *Britz*. She is a politically minded young British female Muslim who becomes radicalised in the post-9/11 and post-7/7 UK. She becomes a suicide bomber and hides the bomb with a maternity suit.

**Pierre-** Pierre is a character in *Female Agents*. He is the Special Operations Executive (SOE) agent who gets the mission of putting together a group of female agents tasked with rescuing a British geologist from a German military hospital in Normandy. Pierre is Louise's brother.

**Sabia-** Sabia is a character in *Britz*. She is Nasima's best friend who is imprisoned under terrorism laws and subsequently commits suicide.

**Sohail-** Sohail is a main character in *Britz* and Nasima's brother. 'Sohail's story' is the first episode in the two-part drama. While his sister Nasima becomes radicalised, Sohail starts working for the British intelligence service, MI5, and is working to prevent the attack his sister is part of.

**Suzy-** Suzy is one of the agents in *Female Agents*. She was chosen for the mission in France because she had had a relationship with Heindrich, the Nazi Officer Pierre want to assassinate.

**Trevor McDonald-** McDonald is the journalist who interviews Faye Turney for ITV.

**Ulrike-** Ulrike Meinhof is a main character in the *Baader-Meinhof Complex*. She is a journalist who decides to join other radically minded left-activists in the Red Army Faction (RAF) which legitimises violence in pursuit of political goals.

## Chapter 5

# **HEROINES: Versions of Motherhood**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I explore the way in which subjects are written as heroines in representations of female agency in political violence. I argue that motherhood is central to the process of enabling agency and I subsequently discuss stories of heroines as versions of motherhood. In the first section, I theorise stories of heroines by discussing three different discourses that organise representations of female agency in political violence and constitute the Myth of Motherhood: the *Vacant Womb*, the *Protective Mother* and the *Non-Mother*. I argue that heroine stories are constructed as the female subject is written either in maternal language or as lacking the ‘maternal essence’. In the case of the latter, this takes place in two ways: as an empty womb or as a masculine subject who can ‘do-it-as-a-man’. First, a *Vacant Womb* is more likely to be a heroine than a once occupied womb. This is because a *Vacant Womb* not yet has utilised her life-giving capacity and there is, therefore, no tension between life-giving (Myth of Motherhood) and life-taking (agency in political violence). However, in a heroine story, the subject’s actions can also be explained through a maternal relationship to others. Then, the subject is performing ‘natural’ femininity in line with the Myth of Motherhood. In other discursive practices, the heroine subject is different to the ‘normal’ woman. For example, the female subject might be positioned as masculine, which communicates that this

subject is not a 'real' woman anyway. Here, the heroine is not performing 'natural' femininity, but is in fact acting outside the boundary of 'natural' femininity. However, crucially, in these discursive contexts, the heroine is allowed agency as a perpetrator of political violence because she is a cultural exception. I refer to this discourse as the *Non-Mother*. This heroine is part of a minority and, therefore, does not challenge 'natural' femininity and the Myth of Motherhood. In the following section, I discuss the empirical cases through the discourses and show how female subjects are written as heroines in various discursive settings by performing the discourses mentioned. For example, I demonstrate how Faye Turney is written as a heroine through the *Protective Mother* discourse and how in *Female Agents*, the female subjects are written as heroines through the discourses of the *Vacant Womb* and the *Non-Mother*. In the conclusion, I argue that in representations of female agency in political violence told as stories of heroines, agency is either negotiated through motherhood or through an absence of motherhood. As such, I argue, heroine stories are versions of motherhood as 'natural' femininity is emphasised and, subsequently, the Myth of Motherhood is reinforced.

## 2. THEORISING HEROINES

### 2.1 *The Vacant Womb*

In both monster- and heroine stories, I argue, discourses of 'empty wombs' signifying the opposite of motherhood are used to discipline interpretations along essentialist understandings of gender and agency. However, there is a difference between these 'empty wombs'. In stories

about female heroines, the empty womb often signifies ‘vacant’/‘free’, ready to be filled, in other words it signifies norms of heterosexuality and a potential for fullness. This is the story about the *Vacant Womb*, the empty yet fertile womb. The *Vacant Womb* performs ‘natural’ femininity because the subject does not transgress boundaries of appropriate gender behaviour. In fact, it is precisely because the subject has not utilised her life-giving capacity, yet, that it/she does not challenge essentialist understandings of gender, agency and violence and as such risk disrupting the content of the Myth of Motherhood. Moreover, the discourse of the *Vacant Womb* also links the subject to virginity which is demonstrated with the fact that female heroines historically have been portrayed as childless and, in addition, preferably virgins. Examples such as Joan of Arc and Queen Elizabeth I<sup>16</sup> can be mentioned here, but I would also extend this argument to situations where women’s life-giving identity is prioritised over their life-taking identity. For example, in Israel, women are drafted for military service, but only to age 24 or motherhood, whichever comes first, whereas it is life-long for men (Goldstein 2001: 86). As wives or mothers they are not suited for military service, for risking their life. Instead, their role is to give life.

A contemporary example of a construction of a heroine through the discourse of the *Vacant Womb* is the mass media representation of US soldier Jessica Lynch as the first heroine of the war in Iraq in 2003 which I mentioned in Chapter 4. Lynch was involved in an incident that left eleven US soldiers killed and seven captured. Lynch was injured, captured and then rescued by Special Forces from the Iraqi hospital where she had been treated. Lynch was immediately constructed as a heroine: a ‘maintenance clerk turned woman-warrior’ (Priest et.

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<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, in stories of female heroines they are not necessarily part of the killing process. Although Joan of Arc was leading armies, she refused to kill personally (Goldstein 2001: 117). Similarly, Queen Elizabeth did not take an active part in the wars she led. Other examples of female heroines have been described in relation to sexual activities: Queen Zenobia and Matilda of Tuscany both led armies on the battlefield. Zenobia was ‘incredibly beautiful [but] only had sex for purposes of procreation’ and Matilda was described as ‘largely chaste’ (Goldstein 2001: 120).

al. 2003: 1). However, as mentioned in Chapter 4, there were in fact three American women involved in the incident and, consequently, there were three potential heroines: Private Jessica Lynch, Private Lori Ann Pietstewa and Specialist Shoshana Johnson. Pietstewa died from her injuries. Like Lynch, Johnson was taken hostage. Like Lynch, Johnson was also rescued. Even though Johnson was held hostage much longer than Lynch and even though she had been fighting back, it was Lynch who was constructed as a 'Rambette' even though she had actually been hiding for cover as her weapon jammed (Sjolander and Trevenen 2010: 159; Kampfner 2003).

Various scholars have critiqued gendered and racial aspects of the Jessica Lynch story and argued that Lynch's whiteness was crucial to the heroine/victim narrative as the other two women involved were non-white.<sup>17</sup> Sjoberg (2007) argues that the exclusion of Lori Pietstewa, who was Native American, and Shoshana Johnson, who is African American, expose the racial aspect of what is considered appropriate femininity as well as that their agency in the incident is removed. In addition, I suggest that in comparison to Pietstewa and Johnson, Lynch was better suited as the heroine because she did not have children. Pietstewa was a single mother of two who left her four-year-old son and three-year-old daughter with her parents while she went to Iraq (Younge 2003). Shoshana Johnson has a daughter. Both Johnson and Pietstewa were described in the media as 'single mothers' (Prividera and Howard 2006: 33). I do not wish to refute claims regarding race, I am not providing a counter-argument. I argue, however, that the Myth of Motherhood is present in the Jessica Lynch story in the form of the discourse of the *Vacant Womb* and, thus, that race is intersected with ideas about motherhood and the boundaries of 'natural' femininity in the construction of heroines.

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<sup>17</sup> See for example Prividera and Howard (2006), Pin-Fat and Stern (2005), Hunt and Rygiel (2006).

As discussed in Chapter 4, the potential agency that women are traditionally associated with in war tends to be of a caring, nurturing or supportive character. Therefore, I argue that Piastewa and Johnson, having rejected their 'natural' caring and nurturing roles as mothers by leaving their children behind, were less compatible with conventional constructions of female heroism. Their heroism did not fit traditional stories of female heroism as their actions challenged essentialist understandings of gender, agency and violence. Thus, I argue that the construction of Lynch as the female heroine was made possible due to the Myth of Motherhood because an empty yet *Vacant Womb* fits the heroine story better than a once occupied womb. Through the discourse of the *Vacant Womb*, the subject is allowed agency in political violence and the tension between life-giving and life-taking is 'removed'. This is how Lynch's empty womb enables her being written as a heroine, while in the cases of Piastewa and Johnson the tension could not be removed and, as a result, their agency is denied. In addition, Lynch's faith in God was presented again and again as evidence of her position as an exemplar of American values and bravery (Sjolander and Trevenen 2010: 168-9). This association to faith also emphasises virginity and strengthens the writing of Lynch as the *Vacant Womb*.

The central positioning of the empty, *Vacant Womb* in stories about female heroism is also echoed in popular culture. According to Sherrie Inness, the stereotypical female heroine in popular culture is likely to be muscular but not too muscular, independent, but not as tough as the males around her, and she is typically childless (Inness 2004: 12). Moreover, in her discussion of Lara Croft, the virtual heroine in the computer game Tomb Raider, Claudia Herbst argues that Lara Croft's body is designed to trigger sexual impulses leading up to reproduction. For example, Lara Croft's tiny waist is considered seductive because it indicates she is not pregnant and thus 'available' for the act of procreation. However, Herbst argues,



Lara Croft's presence denies everything related to reproduction; the question of menstruation, pregnancy and potential for motherhood. Biologically, Lara Croft is not capable of reproducing (Herbst 2004: 28-35). If the female heroine does have a child, her aggression is shown as a manifestation of her desire to save him or her (Inness 2004: 12). I refer to this discourse as the *Protective Mother*.

## **2.2 The Protective Mother**

Most often, women are portrayed as unable to kill because they are, or could be, mothers. This is how the capacity to kill (agency in political violence) is juxtaposed with the capacity to give life (Myth of Motherhood). Importantly, however, what is considered appropriate or 'natural' female behaviour for women or mothers can shift dramatically within relatively short periods of time and by geographical location. As an example, historian Joanna Bourke mentions the American frontier where hand-to-hand combat with Indians was considered to be appropriate behaviour for the good American wife and mother (Bourke 1999: 311). Furthermore, femininity has also been claimed as the reason for women's participation in violence. According to this logic, women kill because they are super-feminine. Miriam Cooke argues that although such female combatants are sometimes caricatured and often feared, they command a much higher social prestige (Cooke 1996: 36). Explanations for why women kill have also been linked to their maternal nature. According to this narrative, maternal passions, biological urges, transform women into fearsome killers. The argument is that women would have little difficulty killing in the defence of their husbands, lovers and children (Bourke 1999: 318, 321). This is how the discourse of the *Protective Mother* works to explain

women's participation in violence as performances of 'natural' femininity, supporting women's roles as caring, nurturing, protecting their children, husband or lover.

The discourse of the *Protective Mother* organises stories of heroines where the subject performs 'natural' femininity along a maternal role. However, the maternal relationship does not have to be biological. As an example, Sigourney Weaver as 'Ripley' in *Aliens* is a fierce protector of a young girl called Newt, 'promising her own death if need be to save the girl from the Alien Mama' (Bundtzen 2000: 105; Cooke 1996: 36). Thus, the discourse of the *Protective Mother* influences stories where female agency in political violence as heroism is explained in their maternal relationship to others.

### **2.3 The Non-Mother**

Contrary to the discourses organising stories of heroines mentioned above where the subject performs 'natural' femininity, the discourse of the *Non-Mother* influences stories of heroines where the subject does not perform 'natural' femininity. Instead, this type of heroine is different or deviant in some way. Here, the subject departs from the norm and boundary of 'natural' femininity by being, for example, childless, masculine, gay or a prostitute. The common denominator is that this heroine is already acting outside the boundary of 'natural' femininity and is, therefore, not considered a 'normal' or 'real' woman anyway. I refer to this discourse as the *Non-Mother* because the subject, while being represented as having agency rather than being acted upon, is not using its capacity to give life, but is in fact 'unable' to perform motherhood. Stereotypically, the gay woman is not interested in the act of [natural] reproduction, the masculine woman can 'do-it-as-a-man' and the prostitute is not using her womb for the act of procreation but is using her body for economic gains and is in this sense

empowered. Examples include the popular film *G.I. Jane* (1997) about the first woman (fictional) to undergo training with the US Naval Special Warfare Group. *G.I. Jane* demonstrates the masculinisation of the female body because in order to turn G.I. Jane's soft, feminine body into a hard machine, it needs to be militarised and this means masculinised:

O'Neil has to train hard, and she loses her period (the female physician describes this as 'normal' for female athletes). In the end she does well enough humping a very large man off a battlefield, albeit with buddy-assistance, and well enough to pass all the other physical hurdles, including pain endurance and psychological resilience. When she shouts 'Suck my dick!', context and metaphor triumph over all, and she's in. (Carver 2007: 314)

However, as I argue in Chapter 6, there is a limit to this masculinisation and if the subject transgresses that limit, it will be constructed as monstrous rather than heroic. The discourse of the *Non-Mother* still communicates that the subject is a heroine but at the same time she is not a 'real' woman because she is not using her body in the 'natural' way. The *Non-Mother* can 'do-it-like-a-man', her agency in political violence is accepted and she is not written as monstrous. Hence, the discourse of the *Non-Mother* allows the subject to be a perpetrator of political violence, a heroine with agency, precisely because she is already acting outside the boundary of 'natural' femininity. The reason for writing the subject who is performing the discourse of the *Non-Mother* as a heroine rather than a monster, I argue, is because the *Non-Mother* represents the inversion of the feminine and is therefore in a minority. In other words, these subjects are cultural exceptions. As a minority, these heroines do not disrupt the Myth of Motherhood even though they have transgressed the boundary of 'natural' femininity. This is how the performing subjects' agency is limited. In the end, the writing of the *Non-Mother* is still reaffirming masculine power because such subjects are only allowed agency if they are

isolated cases in a minority. If there is a critical mass of female perpetrators of political violence acting outside the boundary of 'natural' femininity, they could instead be represented as monsters. In isolation, however, they are allowed to be heroines. In this sense, the female subjects are acting out the masculinised norm.

To conclude, the discourse of the *Non-Mother* influence heroine stories where the subject is lacking 'natural' femininity as in being caring, maternal or using their womb for procreation. Instead, the discourse of the *Non-Mother* constructs the subject as unable to use their life-giving identity. Yet, because the subject constitutes a minority, it does not threaten the Myth of Motherhood and is subsequently allowed to be different. What is communicated in representations of female agency in political violence where the subject is produced through the discourse of the *Non-Mother* is that the subject is not a 'real' woman. Thus, through interpellation we are called upon not to identify with the *Non-Mother* subject, but in opposition to it/her. As a result, 'natural' femininity is still produced as that which is different from the *Non-Mother* subject. Thus, even though a limited version of female agency of political violence is allowed in heroine stories in this way, such agency is different from 'natural' femininity and, therefore, what is communicated is that the heroine subject hold agency on the expense of its potential life-giving identity.

### 3. HEROINE STORIES: Versions of Motherhood

In this section, I show how female subjects within various discursive practices perform the discourses of the *Vacant Womb*, the *Protective Mother* and the *Non-Mother*. As such, these

subjects hold agency within those discursive practices, which, I argue, in different ways function to reinforce 'natural' femininity. This takes place either through the subject's (potential) maternal performance of 'natural' femininity or by the subject being allowed agency because of its difference from 'natural' femininity.

### **3.1 Performing the *Vacant Womb***

#### Louise

Louise is the main character in *Female Agents* and initially portrayed as the leader of the group. As an empty womb, she is tough and capable of killing enemies. However, on a train to Paris, Louise finds out that she is pregnant. She goes to the toilet and looks at herself in the mirror. She feels her breasts, wondering if they have become larger. She looks down on her belly in the mirror. She takes a step back and moves her hands from her breasts to her belly. She takes a deep breath and gives an uncomfortable facial expression. In cinema studies, mirrors can function to signify ambiguity or duplicity (Hayward 1996: 4). Hence, I argue that this scene communicates that Louise is no longer performing the discourse of the *Vacant Womb*. She is no longer the given heroine. The representation of Louise also changes from this moment onwards. After this, Louise is often represented as a passive and emotional victim rather than a heroine and her pregnancy is used to construct her as such. The following conversation takes place when Louise and Jeanne have found out that Suzy has had a child but given it up for adoption:

[Jeanne:] Suzy's cut up about what she did.

[Louise:] Why? Maybe she would have been a terrible mother.

[Jeanne:] How can you say that? Except dying, nothing worse can happen to a kid.

[Louise:] There is always worse.

[Jeanne:] Pity is not your strongest point. Try to be a little bit human for once.

[Louise:] In the train, I found out that I was three months pregnant. I can't be more human. My husband and I had been trying for kids for years.

When Louise has been captured, she is bravely enduring torture. Although these scenes communicate heroism, we learn that she lost her unborn baby as a consequence. The following conversation takes place when Jeanne has rescued Louise from the transport which was taking her to her execution:

[Jeanne:] What about Gaelle?

Louise shakes her head. Jeanne reaches for Louise's belly, Louise embraces her and we understand that Louise has lost the baby. At the end of the film, Louise goes to a church to light candles for the other girls. As she walks out of church the following text is shown on the screen:

In 1949, Louise returned to France and married an architect. She was awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Legion d'Honneur. She died in 2004 at the age of 98, **childless**.

I argue that Louise's heroism is valued in relation to her sacrifice of motherhood. The sacrifice seems even greater due to the fact that Louise and her deceased husband had 'been trying for years' to get pregnant. In this sense, Louise's heroism is measured by the fact that she sacrificed her unborn child by her dead husband. At the end, 'childless' functions to

remind the audience of Louise's sacrifice but it also signifies that all heroines portrayed in the film are empty wombs, even though some of them had actually been pregnant. As such, what is communicated in this discursive practice is heroism's association with childlessness. This is how heroism is associated with empty wombs and heroines constructed through the discourse of the *Vacant Womb* where the tension between life-giving and life-taking has been 'removed'.

### Gaelle

In *Female Agents*, one way in which Gaelle performs the discourse of the *Vacant Womb* is with references to her faith. She is religious and due to her Christian beliefs, she initially refuses to take part in killing. In preparation for their mission, the women receive, in addition to some money and new identities, a cyanide pill which they are meant to use as a last resort if they are captured. When Gaelle boards the plane which will take them to France, she drops the cyanide pill on purpose. On the plane, Pierre approaches Gaelle:

[Pierre:] You lost this.

[Gaelle:] It does not matter. I would never use it. It is **against my religion**.

[Louise:] God does not care what goes on down here.

[Gaelle:] Do you say that because of your husband? (Louise looks at Pierre assuming he must have told Gaelle that Louise's husband had been killed.)

[Gaelle:] My brother was shot on his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, but **I never lost my faith**.

At the military hospital in Normandy where the group rescues a British geologist, Gaelle does not use violence herself, however, she enables Pierre to shoot a soldier. After their successful mission in which the agents killed several German soldiers, Gaelle reflects on the use of force:

[Gaelle:] When the war is over I will light a candle for you in church.  
Promise me you will do the same.

Although not executing violence herself in line with her faith and moral codes, Gaelle is initially positioned as very brave and heroic. For example, on their way to Paris after their first successful mission in Normandy, the agents stop at a safe house. Gaelle finds herself in an argument with Jeanne, the prostitute:

[Gaelle:] You are used to humiliation. I am not! I refuse to crawl to the Germans! (She grabs Jeanne by the neck and pushes her to a wall.)

[Gaelle:] Pierre has been arrested, Rene is dead. It is our duty to take their place.

Soon afterwards, the agents hear cars stopping outside the safe house and ensuing shooting. Louise walks up from the safety of the cellar whereupon she is attacked by a German officer, however, just as the German officer is about to stab her, Gaelle appears, shoots and kills him. Gaelle has rescued Louise. In tension with her religious beliefs, Gaelle too has now killed. She does not move and takes a long look at her victim. Gaelle seems shocked by what she has done.

The writing of Gaelle as a heroine with references to her faith continues: When the group of agents are on the train to Paris, Jeanne seizes an opportunity and gets off the train with the



suitcase which is full of money. It is Gaelle who notices, catches up with her and forces her to get back on the train:

[Gaelle:] Jeanne!

[Jeanne:] Louise is with a Kraut. We are fucked. Come with me.

[Gaelle:] Running won't win over your mum.

[Jeanne:] Or save my dad from Verdun. Don't get preachy with me.

(Gaelle blocks Jeanne's way and points a gun at her from underneath coat.)

[Jeanne:] What is that? **"Thou shall not kill?"**

[Gaelle:] Who is getting preachy now?

Here, Gaelle's loyalty to Louise and the mission makes her a strong and brave heroine. I argue that although Gaelle initially is signifying that it is not natural for women, or for good Christians, to kill, it is still through the many religious references that Gaelle is written as a heroine. Her empty womb in combination with the religious references emphasise virginity. This is how Gaelle is performing the discourse of the *Vacant Womb*.

### Suzy

Another of the female agents, Suzy, was chosen by Pierre because she had had a relationship with Heindrich, the German Nazi officer that the group is trying to assassinate. We learn that she left him because 'she didn't want to belong to a man'. We also learn, however, that she was pregnant at the time she left him but that he was unaware of it.

[Suzy:] He never knew I was pregnant. (sobbing).

[Jeanne:] You have got a kid? (Suzy shakes her head).

[Jeanne:] You gave it up?

[Suzy:] A family in Liverpool. No more Nazi dad and collaborator mum. (Louise is listening in).

[Suzy:] For him, the slate is clean. (Jeanne puts her hand on Suzy's shoulder to comfort her. Louise sighs.)

Suzy claimed that she would have made a bad mother so she gave the baby up for adoption. I argue that it is the fact that Suzy is unsuited for a life-giving role that enables her to be written as a heroine. What is communicated is that the two identities of life-giving and life-taking cannot co-exist 'naturally'. In this case, Suzy's identity of life-giving has been 'removed' in order for her to hold agency in political violence and being written as a heroine. Suzy is performing the discourse of the *Vacant Womb* despite having been pregnant and given birth. Being unsuited for a life-giving role enables her to perform a life-taking role as a female agent. Moreover, because Suzy signifies heterosexuality, and still a potential for fullness, she does not indicate difference in the same way as subjects performing the discourse of the *Non-Mother* discussed below.

### 3.2 Performing the *Protective Mother*

#### Faye

Faye Turney's heroism was constructed with reference to her motherhood. Front pages were headlined as 'Faye knew the risks when she **left Molly** to serve in Iraq: **courage** of sailor held

captive in Iran' and '**Bravery: Faye holds daughter Molly**' (Lyons, *Daily Record*, 28/03/2007). It was reported that she '**loves being a mum** and her greatest concern right now will be for her little girl and how badly she is being affected by this' (Newton Dunn and Parker, *Sun*, 27/03/2007; Beeston and Kennedy, *Times*, 27/03/2007). In the *Sun* she is the '**Hero Mum**' pictured cuddling her daughter. The photo of Turney holding her daughter, however, is of a new-born baby, not depicting the fact that Turney's daughter was three years old at the time. I argue that this photo not only implies inappropriateness because her daughter is so young, but the photo of Turney and her new-born daughter also signify the icon of motherhood, the natural bond between mother and child and the association of 'natural' femininity and motherhood as explained in Chapter 3. Even in the *Independent*, whose journalist Terri Judd interviewed Faye Turney days before the hostage taking, the focus is on her heroism as a mother as one title reads: 'A **mother undaunted** by 17-hour shifts and a macho world' (Judd, *Independent*, 28/03/07).

Moreover, as mentioned above, maternal relationships do not have to be biological. The discourse of the *Protective Mother* also influences the representation of Faye Turney's agency in political violence through her relationship with her fellow soldiers. Arthur Batchelor was the only sailor except Turney who sold their story to the media. Interestingly, even in his story, which was published in the *Mirror*, most focus is on Turney. The article is titled: '**Faye saved me**: Brave colleague got me through my kidnap horror'. Batchelor describes how Turney was comforting him when they had just been arrested and were transported to Iranian mainland:

Topsy [Turney] kept on whispering to make sure I was okay, she just **reassured me** that we were all together. The guards got really aggressive whenever they heard us communicating. Topsy really **put**

**her neck on the line** to make sure I was holding up. (Hughes and Stansfield, *Mirror*, 09/04/2007)

Then, speaking of the moment when they were reunited Batchelor said:

I missed Topsy [Turney] most of all. I really **love her, as a mum and a big sister** and I can't describe how that felt...just every emotion rolled into one. I ran up to her, threw my arms round her and **cried like a baby**... When I'd calmed down, she asked, 'Do you need another hug, a **mother hug**?' and I said 'damn right'... Topsy said she'd always be there for me, to **protect me** and look after me. (Hughes and Stansfield, *Mirror*, 09/04/2007)

Faye Turney's maternal role in their relationship was portrayed in the *Sun* as: 'Touchingly, Arthur, the youngest Brit, said: Faye was like a big sister or a mum to me, she gave me hugs when I needed them' (Moult, Newton Dunn and Lazzeri, *Sun*, 07/04/2007) and echoed by Turney in the ITV interview:

My boat crew had the youngest member, Arthur Batchelor, and I remember I put my arms around him and told him that **if you ever need a mum** or a sister or a hug, he was to find me and **I would be there for him**. (ITV 2007)

At this stage, Trevor McDonald, the interviewer, says: 'I think he has since said that you were **like a mother to him**.' Faye Turney responds: 'yeah, he was my main concern. He was the youngest of the group, **he was the baby**' (ITV 2007).

The writing of Faye Turney's agency as a soldier in a maternal language means that Turney is performing 'natural' femininity in these discursive practices. As a woman and also a mother she is expected to be caring and nurturing and her heroism as a soldier is, therefore,

dominated by such traits. By being represented in this way and by giving herself such a maternal role, Turney is acting within the boundaries of 'natural' femininity.

During and after Faye Turney's captivity, voices were raised that she was perhaps a bit too willing to collaborate with the Iranians. In her defence, Turney used her identity as a mother to justify her actions:

If I confessed to being in Iranian waters and wrote letters to my family, the British people and the Iranian people, I'd be free within two weeks. If I didn't, they'd put me on trial for espionage and I'd go to prison for 'several years'. I had just an hour to think about it. If I did it, I feared everyone in Britain would hate me. But I knew it was my one chance of fulfilling a **promise to Molly** that I'd be home for her birthday on May 8. (Newton Dunn and Moulton, *Sun*, 09/04/2007)

When Turney accepted a huge sum of money to sell her story to the media she was perceived as a greedy monster. However, again, the action was justified in the name of motherhood: In the *Daily Star*, the headline reads '**I sold my story for Molly**; Hostage Faye fights back as fury grows over her decision to cash in' (Lawton, *Daily Star*, 09/04/2007).

Faye is a working-class, low-ranking sailor who has to worry about paying off her mortgage and **securing a future for her daughter**. (Sharp and Judd, *Independent*, 15/04/2007)

Adam and I never intended to spend the money on ourselves. It's **for Molly**. It will be for her education and anything else we can do to give her the best start in life. (Moulton and Newton Dunn, *Sun*, 10/04/2007)

The representation of Faye Turney's maternal relationship to her fellow soldiers is a result of essentialist ideas about gender as traits such as emotionality, care and nurture are traditionally associated with women. In this sense, Turney's value as a fellow soldier is related to her role

as a woman and a mother, not in her capabilities as a soldier. I argue that Turney's response with reference to her motherhood repositions her within the discourse of the *Protective Mother* performing 'natural' femininity. Through these discursive practices, the Myth of Motherhood is reconstructed because Faye Turney's life-giving identity is emphasised.

### Janis

In the initial media coverage of Janis Karpinski it is often mentioned that she is childless. In Chapter 6, I argue that such information writes Karpinski as monstrous/different through the discourse of the *Deviant Womb*. Despite, or because of, Karpinski's childlessness, however, she was still also written in maternal language. Here, I argue that maternal language is used in representations of Karpinski in order to write her as a competent leader.

First, being the only female general in Iraq, Janis Karpinski was interviewed and written as a 'caring commander' months before the Abu Ghraib scandal emerged:

'She's really **caring**,' says Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Philip J. May of Pinellas Park. 'She doesn't just talk the talk, she walks the walk.' She sends **personal** letters to the families [of lost ones] and tries to attend all memorial services in Iraq. '**I love my soldiers**, she says. 'When I ask if there's a problem or I hear of a problem, I make every effort to resolve it, and if I can't, I tell them why I can't or why the system can't, there is no lip service.' (Taylor Martin, *St. Petersburg Times*, 14/12/2003)

When the initial coverage of the Abu Ghraib scandal begun and Janis Karpinski was mentioned as in charge of the soldiers shown in the photos, it was stories of the caring commander that were used in her defence:

A captain and a lieutenant colonel from the Army Reserve, both of whom served with Karpinski during her stint as commander, praised her leadership. They described her as **caring** and in charge. ‘She is very **personable** and she’s very soldier-oriented,’ says Lt. Col. Dennis McGlone, commander of the 744th MP Battalion, one of the subordinate units to the 800th MP Brigade. (Copeland, *Washington Post*, 10/05/2004)

**I love my soldiers**, she said. When I ask if there’s a problem or I hear of a problem, I make every effort to resolve it, and if I can’t, I tell them why I can’t or why the system can’t. (Unattributed, *Daily Mail*, 30/04/2004)

Answering to criticism, one of Karpinski’s attorneys said Army investigators had ignored statements by officers in her brigade ‘replete with praise and admiration of her clear guidance, firm, fair and common-sense enforcement of standards, [and] her **caring** for the soldiers’ (Smith, *Washington Post*, 24/05/2004). Similarly, when Karpinski was described as ‘extremely emotional during much of the interview’ in General Taguba’s investigation, the response was made with reference to her maternal caring role as an expression of good leadership:

And if I’m emotional about my troops, then that’s a credit to my leadership abilities and my leadership skills and my **compassion** for my soldiers. But, I did what I needed to do as a leader. And I know how to lead, and I know how to **take care of soldiers**. (Karpinski, *Signal City*, 04/07/2004)

Karpinski says she gets **passionate** when speaking of her soldiers, and rightly so. It is not only her reputation she is defending, she says, but the reputations of the thousands of good soldiers serving at the prisons who were not involved in wrongdoing. ‘If you don’t **get emotional** when you’re talking about your soldiers who served with you for a

year, there's something wrong with you,' she says. (Copeland, *Washington Post*, 10/05/2004)

The discourse of the *Protective Mother* not only framed Karpinski's identity as the caring commander in maternal language, but it also organised the story of Karpinski as a strong leader defending her soldiers:

He made it sound like I was blubbing and crying the whole time I was being interviewed, like I was an out-of-control, emotionally distraught woman. Well, I can tell you this: that the only time there were tears in my eyes, and I did get emotional, was when I was **defending my soldiers**. And I would do it again today, I would do it again next week, I will always do it. Because they deserve it. And I felt like all of their accomplishments were being pulled away from them, by design, for something that they didn't do or have any participation in, with the exception of the six or seven who were so vividly photographed. (Karpinski, *Signal City*, 04/07/2004)

However, Karpinski also defended the soldiers being depicted and punished for the scandal:

Well, they've been accused of being responsible for the photographs. But if we take it down to the very basics, Lynndie England did not deploy to Iraq with a dog collar and a dog leash. So obviously somebody gave her those props that we see in those photographs that are now seen around the world. (Karpinski, *Signal City*, 13/11/2005)

I think the MI people were in this all the way. I think they were up to their ears in it... I don't believe that the MPs, two weeks onto the job, would have been such willing participants, even with instructions, unless someone had told them it was all okay. (Higham, Stephens and White, *Washington Post*, 23/05/2004)



Refusing to single-handedly take the blame for what happened at Abu Ghraib, Karpinski also spoke out on behalf of reservists in general:

We're disposable, she said of the military's attitude toward reservists. Why would they want the active-duty people to take the blame? They want to put this on the M.P.'s [Military Police] and hope that this thing goes away. Well, it's not going to go away. (Shenon, *New York Times*, 02/05/2004)

In addition, Karpinski's childlessness was compensated as she was written in maternal language in her relationship to a parrot:

She and George have **no children**, but they have kept an African gray parrot named Casey for 26 years, and she delights in telling of him. He can bark and meow; he can say 'hello' when the phone rings. He is so used to flying with Karpinski on her various assignments, he can even say 'Delta is my airline.' On Saturday, Karpinski pulls from her bag a rather large framed photograph. It is of Casey. She says she brought it with her because she hasn't been able to spend much time with him lately, and this way, he's with her all day. (Copeland, *Washington Post*, 10/05/2004)

I argue that the focus on Karpinski's maternal relationship to her soldiers and to her parrot<sup>18</sup> attempts to compensate the fact that she and her husband decided not to have children. By showing Karpinski as the caring, nurturing mother, even though she is an empty womb, Karpinski is still performing 'natural' femininity and the Myth of Motherhood is communicated. The representation of Janis Karpinski as the caring commander, both by media and by Karpinski herself is a result of essentialist ideas about gender, agency and violence as traits such as emotionality, care and nurture are traditionally associated with

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<sup>18</sup> Karpinski even dedicates her book *One Woman's Army* to 'Casey, my African Grey parrot'.

women. When Karpinski was constructed a bad leader through accusations of being emotional it was in gendered language. Similarly, when Karpinski responded to such claims, it was in gendered language. Karpinski's defence was influenced by the discourse of the *Protective Mother* which enables agency within the boundary of 'natural' femininity. By protecting and defending her soldiers, Karpinski was performing 'natural' femininity according to traditional ideas about gender, agency and violence. Her leadership skills were measured in their maternal value and her 'natural' emotionality was a valuable asset in a female commander. This is how the discourse of the *Protective Mother* is constructing heroines holding agency in political violence within the boundaries of 'natural' femininity and how such stories function to emphasise identities of life-giving and the Myth of Motherhood.

### **3.3 Performing the *Non-Mother***

Above, the Myth of Motherhood has been communicated as the subject has performed 'natural' femininity through the discourses of the *Vacant Womb* and the *Protective Mother* producing heroine stories. However, heroines are also produced through the discourse of the *Non-Mother* when the heroine/subject is not performing 'natural' femininity. In these discursive practices, however, 'natural' femininity is still communicated in opposition to these heroines, who for various reasons are not seen as 'real' women. In my empirical cases, the *Non-Mother* materialises in three different ways: as a prostitute, as masculine, and by a heterosexual identity which is denying its life-giving role. This is how the Myth of Motherhood is constituted by the *Non-Mother* discourse.

Jeanne

In *Female Agents*, Jeanne is the strongest heroine. She is the one who rescues Louise from prison; she is the one who sacrifices herself for the mission by drawing attention to herself as armed in order for Louise to assassinate Heindrich, the German Nazi Officer who is their target. At the end, we learn that due to such an act of heroism, Jeanne was arrested and taken to a concentration camp where she was hanged. Jeanne paid the ultimate price for being heroic. I argue that there are two things in particular that enable the writing of Jeanne as a heroine with agency in political violence: the fact that she is a childless prostitute and her demonstrated capability in killing. The two are intimately linked because it is her trait as a childless prostitute that enables the writing of her as capable of killing.

Jeanne is the first person Louise and Pierre approach when they are setting up the team of agents. The following conversation takes place when Louise and Pierre approach Jeanne who is in prison in London for killing a man.

[Louise:] Your sentence has been put on hold.

[Jeanne:] It's not a mistake? **I killed** a man.

[Louise:] Your pimp? I don't call that a man.

[Jeanne:] Nobody forced me into anything.

[Pierre:] Stop being silly. If not for us, you would have been hanged.  
That's your only alternative to our proposition.

[Jeanne:] I knew there would be a catch. What is this?

[Louise:] We need you for a mission in France.

[Jeanne:] Who do I have to fuck?

[Pierre:] We are reliably informed that you used to perform nude in Soho.

[Jeanne:] You need a girl who will get her leg over, so here I am? You must be desperate.

[Louise:] We also **need a girl who can kill**.

[Jeanne:] What do I get out of this? ... I'm not the type who works for nothing. Thanks anyway. (Jeanne walks away. Louise approaches again.)

[Louise:] You will die like a whore who never had a chance. Is that what you want? If the mission is a success, you will be pardoned. (Jeanne stops and turns around, now clearly interested.)

In the next scene, Louise and Pierre are discussing Jeanne:

[Louise:] I am sure she is the right choice.

[Pierre:] We can't trust her, she is **a nutcase**.

[Louise:] A rope round her neck and she still said no. That takes hell of a nerve.

What is communicated in these scenes is that Jeanne, being a prostitute, has already transgressed the boundary of 'natural' femininity and is therefore not a 'real' woman. Acting outside the boundary of 'natural' femininity, her agency in killing is allowed, and, in fact, expected. Because her victim was a pimp who probably was using her, Louise (and the audience) understands Jeanne's motivations. In addition, not only is Jeanne 'using' her womb outside the boundary of 'natural' femininity which is focused on giving birth, but she is also using her body as a commodity in order to make money. Traditionally, female bodies have things done to them, but prostitutes do it themselves which means they are written as subjects.

Thus, the writing of Jeanne as a heroine is influenced by the discourse of the *Non-Mother* in particular by her masculinised ‘thirst’ for money as a prostitute.

Her role as a prostitute is, moreover, often juxtaposed with Gaelle’s religious identity. In the first safe house the agents stay in, Jeanne’s identity as a prostitute and her obsession with money surfaces in an argument with Gaelle:

[Jeanne:] A freezing cellar and rotten apples when we have millions in cash. What better time to **spend our cash**?

[Gaelle:] How can you think of money now?

[Jeanne:] It is **the way I am. I am a whore**, not a choirboy. Never forget it.

When the agents are walking to the aircraft which will take them to France, Suzy asks Jeanne if she has ever got blessed. Jeanne responds: ‘Never. If I get down on my knees it is not to pray’. When the agents are on the train to Paris, it stops abruptly, whereupon a man puts his hands on Jeanne’s breasts.

[Jeanne:] Who do you think you are?

[Man:] Don’t play hard to get.

[Jeanne:] Call me **a slut**, why don’t you.

I argue that the writing of Jeanne as a prostitute facilitates the writing of her as capable of killing. Later, during a conversation with Louise in a safe house in Paris, Jeanne expresses her willingness to kill:

[Jeanne:] In the metro, I sat next to a Jerry. His holster was open and he hadn’t even noticed. But nothing happened.

[Louise:] What should have happened?

[Jeanne:] Nothing. But it gives you ideas. **We should kill** all the Krauts!

I argue that the writing of Jeanne as a heroine is intimately linked with her identity as a prostitute. As a prostitute, Jeanne does not represent the norm of 'natural' femininity. This is what enables the representation of Jeanne as the true heroine, as capable of killing. As an isolated case, Jeanne is allowed agency in political violence because it does not challenge a 'real' woman's life-giving identity and the Myth of Motherhood. In fact, emphasising Jeanne's identity as life-taking (agency in political violence) in order to write her as a heroine also means that her identity as a life-giver is denied: When Louise and Jeanne are preparing the shooting of Heinrich, Jeanne asks Louise if she is ok, looking at and touching Louise's belly.

[Louise:] I am fine, I am not ill.

[Jeanne:] **I just wish I was in your shoes.**

I argue that because Jeanne is a prostitute she is already acting outside the realm of 'natural' femininity and 'real' womanhood. As such, she is allowed to be a masculinised subject. Crucially, however, this also means that she is denied an identity of life-giving. This is how the discourse of the *Non-Mother* influences the writing of Jeanne as the true heroine; a heroine who is capable of killing but who 'cannot' have children. This is also how the tension between a life-giving and a life-taking identity is 'removed'.

Gudrun

Similarly, in *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*, the discourse of the *Non-Mother* influences the writing of Gudrun as a strong leader of the group in two main ways. First, Gudrun is written as masculinised in contrast to Ulrike who is the emotional victim. This is demonstrated in their first meeting, which takes place as Ulrike visits Gudrun in prison in her role as a journalist.

[Gudrun:] This time we won't sit idly as Fascism spreads like under Hitler. This time we will put up resistance. We have a historical responsibility... I'll never resign myself to do nothing. Never. If they shoot our people like Ohnesorg and Dutschke then **we are going to shoot back**. That is the logical consequence.

[Ulrike:] You are not serious?

[Gudrun:] All over the world armed comrades are fighting. We must show our solidarity.

[Ulrike:] But we do.

[Gudrun:] Even if the Fascists throw you in jail? Such sacrifices have to be made. Or do you think that your theoretical masturbation will change anything?

Here, a violence/non-violence dichotomy is used in order to position the two women against each other. Being the masculinised subject, action and the use of force is 'natural' to Gudrun, whereas for Ulrike, who in this scene represents 'natural' femininity and non-violence, it is not. To emphasise this divide, Ulrike is dressed in light, beige clothes and Gudrun is wearing dark clothes. Gudrun is looking Ulrike straight in the eyes, argues very powerfully with much conviction, whereas Ulrike is mostly looking downwards, communicating passivity. Another way in which the two women's general appearance is contrasted is through the use of make-up. Gudrun is most often portrayed with very dark make-up which creates a harsh and more

masculine impression in contrast to Ulrike who is not wearing make-up at all and, thereby gives a softer, more feminine, appearance. What is communicated is that to the feminine subject (Ulrike) violence is not natural, whereas to the masculine subject (Gudrun) it is.

As mentioned above, the characters in *Female Agents*, are written as heroines be being empty wombs, even though some agents have been pregnant. The writing of Gudrun as a *Non-Mother* and masculinised subject also means her identity as a life-giver is removed. This happens as Gudrun is leaving her infant son and her role as a mother in order to pursue her political ambitions. The first time we meet Gudrun she is sitting with her parents, fiancé and son, watching a TV debate in which Ulrike Meinhof is one of the panellists. Gudrun's father critiques Ulrike's viewpoints but Gudrun defends her. Gudrun's father leaves and says: 'Sorry, I have to go to church' (he is a priest) whereupon Gudrun says:

[Gudrun:] Well, why don't you preach that over half the world's population are starving while others bathe in luxury! That there's no use in just praying for a better world! That they **have to fight back, damn it!**

Gudrun gets angry and leaves the room. Her father tells her fiancé: 'You two should get married soon!' What is communicated here is that Gudrun's political views are not appropriate for a woman and by getting married Gudrun should be able to return to 'natural' femininity. The next time we see Gudrun, we realise that she has left both her fiancé and her son. Hence, Gudrun's sacrifice of motherhood is not made visible and, thus, not problematised. For Gudrun, this sacrifice is 'natural':

[Gudrun:] What we need is a new morality. You have to draw a clear line between yourself and your enemies. Free yourself from the system and burn all bridges behind you.



[Ulrike:] **What about your son?**

[Gudrun:] If you are serious, you have to be able to **make** such **sacrifices. Andreas has a little girl** as well.

I argue that in order for Gudrun to be written as the masculine *Non-Mother* subject, she had to have sacrificed motherhood; the life-giving identity had to be removed. The way in which Gudrun and Ulrike are positioned against each other, through dichotomies of being active/passive, rational/emotional, dark/light, hard/soft and violent/non-violent, emphasises the tension between the identity of life-giving (Myth of Motherhood), which Ulrike represents, and the identity of life-taking (agency in political violence) which Gudrun represents. I continue this argument in Chapter 7 when I discuss the writing of Ulrike as a victim. The juxtaposition between Gudrun and Ulrike also implies that Gudrun is an exception from the norm. Gudrun is different to the norm of 'natural' femininity; instead, she shows us what we are not. This is how Gudrun is allowed agency in political violence by performing the discourse of the *Non-Mother*.

### Faye

As mentioned above, a *Vacant Womb* is better suited for the role of the heroine, than a once occupied womb. Therefore, when Faye Turney's identity, as a woman and a mother, was revealed on 27 March 2007 when the *Sun*'s front page news read 'Let **Mummy** Go' written in a childish handwriting as if it was a message from her daughter, there was confusion (Newton Dunn and Parker, *Sun*, 27/03/2007). Faye Turney did not fit the stereotype of a heroine. As a result, the representation of Turney split into two identities: the soldier and the mother. The tension between the life-giving and the life-taking identities dominated the media coverage: 'I

really do love my **job** -but I love my **daughter** also' (Coles, *Sun*, 28/03/2007). 'ACTION WOMAN: Faye on guard duty in Sierra Leone in 2000, far right; In the middle of an inflatable during training prior to being sent to the Middle East; With Adam and Molly as a new mum' (Lyons, *Daily Record*, 28/03/2007). Here, the tension inherent in the two Faye Turneys is demonstrated by the choice of images and their composition. On the one hand, there is the 'action woman' and on the other hand, there is the 'new mum'. In another article, the caption to the two photos reads: '**GUN GIRL**: A young Faye, then named Faye Boswell, on guard duty at Lungi beach, Sierra Leone' and '**PROUD PARENTS**: Faye and Adam Turney with daughter Molly, now a three-year-old'. The 'Gun girl' represents her identity as a soldier and 'proud parents' represents her identity as a mother.

Being a mother, Faye Turney clearly did not fit with the discourse of the *Vacant Womb*. Instead, she was described as a brave heroine who could 'do-it-as-a-man', a masculinised subject:

You can't sit back just because you're a girl. I love the satisfaction of being able to walk away from a job and know that I've coped and completed the task just **as well as a man** would have done it.  
(Kennedy, *Times*, 28/03/2007)

I argue that even though Faye Turney is a mother, the representation of her agency is organised by the discourse of the *Non-Mother*. This is because, in order for Faye Turney to be a soldier, she has to temporarily give up her role as a mother. As mentioned above, subjects performing the discourse of the *Non-Mother* do not disrupt the Myth of Motherhood as long as they are seen as cultural exceptions. Thus, the media also reported on that Turney was a minority:

The world has watched in horror as the **brave mum** has been paraded in front of the cameras by her Iranian captors. Faye's courage has shone through during her ordeal, but she remains **one of only a small minority of women** in the military. (Smith and Jackson, *Mirror*, 03/04/2007)

The headline 'Mother set her heart on life in the Royal Navy' was accompanied with 'Leading Seaman Faye Turney is **one of a small number of mothers** who are serving in the war against terror' (Payne and Britten, *Daily Telegraph*, 28/03/2007). While the quote from the *Daily Telegraph* communicates a message of reassurance to the public that there are not many **mothers** serving in the war against terror, in the text, we learn how many **women** are serving in the Army, the Navy and the Royal Air Force, in what roles, where they can serve and where they are excluded, and how many that has been killed. Thus, as a soldier and a war heroine, Faye Turney is an exception to the norm of 'natural' femininity but because she is in a minority, she is allowed agency.

At the same time, however, Faye Turney's 'natural' feelings as a mother, including guilt, were also used to emphasise her 'real' identity:

But it was Molly, her three-year-old daughter, that she spoke of most. She described the **guilt of leaving** behind her 'bubbly, headstrong' little girl to be looked after by her husband, Adam, also serving in the Navy but based in Plymouth. But she believed emphatically that this **sacrifice** would give her daughter every opportunity in life. The 25-year old mother, one of 15 sailors and marines captured, said: 'I know by doing this job I can give my daughter everything she wants in life and hopefully by seeing me doing what I do, she'll grow up knowing that a woman can have a family and have a career at the same time.' (Judd, *Independent*, 28/03/2007)

A front page headline in the *Independent* with the photo of Faye Turney as a soldier in Sierra Leone in 2000 is 'My little girl is growing up every day. **I'm missing that**' (Judd, *Independent*, 28/03/07). One commentator expressed the tension between these identities specifically:

Faye Turney should not receive any criticism for having the **natural feelings of a mother** - or for expressing them; but they were clearly **in conflict with** what she knew was her duty as a **member of the armed forces** in an extraordinarily stressful situation. (Lawson, *Independent*, 10/04/2007)

In addition, the representation of the group of British Navy personnel's return to the UK was above all a story of a mother returning to her daughter. Turney, the soldier, was returning to her 'natural' [proper] role as a mother. The return was described as emotional:

IT was the moment she had prayed for during her darkest hours in captivity. Yesterday Faye Turney the young mother who became the face of the hostage crisis was finally **reunited** with her three-year-old **daughter**. The **ecstatic** 26-year-old wrapped her arms around little Molly, who had spent the last fortnight oblivious to the trauma that her mother was enduring thousands of miles from home. Cradling her delighted daughter, Leading Seaman Turney was also reunited with her husband Adam, who could **barely contain his relief** that the ordeal of the previous 14 days was over. (Kelly, *Daily Mail*, 06/04/2007)

One of the images portraying this news story is a photo of Turney holding her daughter. The caption to this image in the *Times* reads: 'Faye Turney hugs daughter Molly' (Foster and Kennedy, *Times*, 06/04/2007). What is interesting here is that this photo originally also includes Faye Turney's husband Adam, but in the *Times*' representation he is cut out. Again,

this emphasises that this story is about a mother returning to her daughter and it also signifies the icon of motherhood: the association of 'natural' femininity and motherhood.<sup>19</sup> In particular, much of the coverage of the homecoming was of an apologetic Faye Turney and a mother's guilt. One of the *Sun*'s front page headlines' reads 'MUMMY MUMMY' and depicts Turney kissing her daughter. Inside the paper, the article headline is 'I burst into tears and told family **I'M SORRY**'. 'I'm sorry' is printed in capital letters in contrast to the rest of the text. It has much larger font and is located on the middle of the page. There are also two smaller photos of Faye Turney, her husband and their daughter on the page. The article starts with: 'BRAVE Navy hostage Faye Turney told yesterday how she burst into tears and **APOLOGISED** to her family for being a captive in Iran' (Moult and Newton Dunn, *Sun*, 10/04/2007). Faye Turney is quoted saying:

Adam had hold of Molly and we ran to each other. We all hugged and I said, '**I'm sorry**, I love you'. I **felt guilty** for what I'd put them through. (Moult and Newton Dunn, *Sun*, 10/04/2007)

In addition to portraying Turney's apologies to her family and her feelings of guilt as a mother, the representation of Turney was also of a woman who through her ordeal had realised what her true role was, that of a mother:

**MUM** Faye Turney said last night she had **cashed in** on her hostage ordeal in Iran **for the sake of the daughter** she feared she would never see again... now [she was] considering quitting the forces to be a **full-time mum**. (Lawton, *Daily Star*, 09/04/2007)

In the article, an anonymous friend of Turney's is quoted saying:

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<sup>19</sup> The original photo was printed elsewhere in the media coverage and is also available on Google images at [http://img.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2007/03\\_03/turney\\_468x423.jpg](http://img.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2007/03_03/turney_468x423.jpg).

This has shaken her to the core. She had a long time to think about her life and what is really important. She's **just a mum** who loves her daughter and her job. But she has to think of Molly and the future... The way she feels right now, she **can't see herself going back to the frontline**. She loves the Navy, but after what has happened she has to consider **giving it up and just being a mum**. (Lawton, *Daily Star*, 09/04/2007)

One of the captions of the photos reads 'LOVE OF HER LIFE: Faye holds on tight to Molly, the precious daughter she thought she would never see again' (Lawton, *Daily Star*, 09/04/2007). Similarly, the *Sunday Star*'s headline reads 'Faye: I'm **back to being mum**' (Chandler, *Sunday Star*, 08/04/2007). The focus on Turney's return to her daughter communicates that Turney is finally back in her 'proper' element, as a mother, and that her temporary session as an agent of political violence is over. This is how the Myth of Motherhood is limiting Turney's agency in political violence constituted by the discourse of the *Non-Mother*.

Turney was, however, not ready to compromise her role as a soldier. In an article titled 'Yes, I'm a mum with a career', 'Furious Faye hit back at critics who said that mums like her should not serve in the Gulf':

Faye said: 'I have **no regrets** at all. Molly is the light of my life and of course it was difficult to leave her. But I believe a dad is just as important as a mum and as long as one of us is at home with her then I think it's fine. While away, I spoke to Molly every other day. Me not being around all the time is normal. My girl will grow up to be strong and independent and know women and mothers have a right to a career if that is what they want.' (Moult, *Sun*, 09/04/2007)

The article is accompanied by a photo of Turney in her black cap with the title ‘Hard decision...Faye’. On the page there is also a photo of Turney with Molly from the soldiers’ reunion with their families. The text reads: ‘Mummy’s girl...Faye with Molly’ (Moult, *Sun*, 09/04/2007). The focus of the images on Turney’s role as a mother, depicting her and Molly, suggests that this is where she should be, this is what Molly wants. Implied is also that if she does continue her military career, she should feel guilty about leaving her daughter behind. In other words, despite communicating Turney’s viewpoint, the paper also implies the inappropriateness of this, or at least that it is controversial, it is a ‘hard decision’. Thus, the overall message communicated in this article is the inappropriateness of such an action. In the *Sun*, the readers are asked to give their viewpoints on ‘Should Faye return? Have your say at mysun.co.uk’, which also functions to devalue Turney’s decision (Newton Dunn and Moul, *Sun*, 11/04/2007). I suggest that the debate over whether or not Faye Turney should return to her role as a soldier is ultimately about ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ femininity. By ‘learning from her mistakes’, not to go back to her role as a soldier but instead stay at home with her daughter, Faye Turney can exercise ‘natural’ femininity. Nonetheless, Faye Turney returned to her ship.<sup>20</sup> In these discursive practices, Turney tries to resist the Myth of Motherhood, however, by writing her actions as inappropriate, ‘natural’ femininity is still communicated in the overall coverage as that which is different from the *Non-Mother*. Thus, on a meta-level, the Myth of Motherhood is still communicated. This is how Faye Turney’s agency as a soldier and a masculine subject is limited. She is only temporarily allowed agency, she is only temporarily a *Non-Mother*. Instead, the focus on her return to her daughter and her proper role as a mother overall function to reproduce the Myth of Motherhood. In Chapter 6, I discuss boundaries of ‘natural’ femininity and agency in political violence in more detail.

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<sup>20</sup> However, in February the following year Faye Turney quit the Navy after crewmates turned against her for selling her story. Turney reportedly ‘found life so difficult on frigate HMS Cornwall she is now stationed ashore’ (Unattributed, *Sunday Mirror*, 03/02/2008).

#### 4. CONCLUSION: Emphasising ‘natural’ femininity

In this chapter, I have not only shown how stories of heroines are constructed through discourses of the *Vacant Womb*, the *Protective Mother* and the *Non-Mother*, but also how these discourses constitute the Myth of Motherhood. To recap, I argue that the *Vacant Womb* is more suited for female heroism because the life-taking identity does not clash with a life-giving identity. In my empirical cases, the *Vacant Womb* influences the stories of female heroism in *Female Agents* as all women involved are childless. More specifically, I have shown how Gaelle performs the *Vacant Womb* due to references to her faith, moral codes and virginity, and I have shown how both Louise and Suzy perform the *Vacant Womb* by sacrificing either their pregnancy or newly born child. In other words, by ‘removing’ their life-giving identities, the tension between life-giving and life-taking is hidden and the subject is written as a heroine.

The *Protective Mother* discourse, I argue, constructs female heroines who are performing ‘natural’ femininity as they are acting out a caring and maternal role. Through this discourse, Faye Turney was written as a heroine as her actions were represented in a maternal relationship to her fellow soldiers, in particular Batchelor who was the youngest. The representation of Karpinski was also influenced by the *Protective Mother* when she (emotionally) defended her soldiers. Moreover, the discourse of the *Non-Mother* organises stories of female heroines who are unable to perform their life-giving role, permanently or temporarily. By being allowed agency in political violence, these heroines’ life-giving identity is denied or removed. This is why the representation of Janis Karpinski, Gudrun and Faye Turney is focusing on their sacrifice of motherhood, albeit temporary as in the case of Turney. As masculine subjects, these heroines are not ‘real’ women and, therefore, ‘natural’



femininity is not challenged. In fact, Faye Turney is expected to return to 'natural' femininity as she comes home. Moreover, the discourse of the *Non-Mother* also organises the writing of Jeanne as the masculine subject and 'real' heroine of *Female Agents* by writing her as a childless prostitute already acting outside the boundary of 'natural' femininity. As a masculine subject, Jeanne is not only allowed a capacity to kill (agency in political violence), but her identity of life-giving (Myth of Motherhood) is also denied.

To conclude, heroism can be communicated through the subject's maternal role, before, during or in absence of motherhood. In this sense, motherhood is 'everywhere' in stories of heroines and such stories are, therefore, versions of motherhood. Moreover, because of the centrality of motherhood in heroine stories, such stories function to emphasise females' life-giving rather than life-taking identity and, thereby, reinforce the Myth of Motherhood. This is how representations of female agency in political violence are written as heroine stories and how heroine stories fulfil the purpose of reconstructing the Myth of Motherhood.

## Chapter 6

# **MONSTERS: Perversions of Motherhood**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

For some reason the media chose to depict only photos of me. It didn't matter if there were worse things happening in some of the others. It had to be me for some reason. I have no idea why. (BBC Radio 4, 30/05/2009)

Because the photographs showing Private England were **especially shocking** and numerous, she became the face of the scandal, even more so than Private Graner, who was convicted in January of helping to orchestrate the abuse and who admitted during testimony in this case that he had struck a detainee. (Cloud, *New York Times*, 27/09/2005)

In this chapter, I engage with how stories of monsters are constructed and how they function to emphasise 'natural' femininity. I show how stories of monsters are constructed through transgressions of gender boundaries constituting the Myth of Motherhood. Because there is a close link between 'natural' femininity and motherhood and because monsters transgress boundaries of appropriate gender behaviour, I argue that these are stories of 'unnatural' femininity. As such, monster stories are told as perversions of motherhood.

By building on literature on cyborgs as well as contributions to feminist film theory, in the first section, I discuss how monsters are constructed through three different discourses: the *Monstrous-Feminine*, the *Deviant Womb* and the *Femme Castratrice*. In the second section, I show how subjects of monster stories in my empirical cases are performing the discourses mentioned. In the concluding section, I show how ‘natural’ femininity is communicated in monster stories even though the monster itself signifies ‘unnatural’ femininity. I argue that monster stories are used in order to emphasise the boundary between ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ femininity and to show what happens when that border is crossed. In this process, not only is appropriate gender behaviour ‘policed’, but ‘natural’ femininity is also emphasised as that which the monster is not. This is how the ‘othering’ of the monster is deeply intertwined with our understanding of ourselves. Thus, even though the monster signifies ‘unnatural’ femininity and in that sense disrupts the Myth of Motherhood, ‘natural’ femininity and the Myth of Motherhood is still communicated as the boundary of ‘natural’/appropriate femininity is emphasised.

## 2. THEORISING MONSTERS

### 2.1 *The Monstrous-Feminine*

In some horror films the monstrous is produced at the border between human and inhuman, man and beast... in others the border is between the normal and the supernatural, good and evil; or the monstrous is produced at the border which separates those who take up their proper

gender roles from those who do not; or the border is between normal and abnormal sexual desire. (Creed 1999: 253)

In different disciplinary contexts, Barbara Creed and Richard Devetak have developed Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject in order to discuss monsters and monstrosity. Devetak uses the concept in order to show how 'the other' is featured in thinking about international politics, in particular constructions of 'good' and 'evil' in the 'war on terror' (Devetak 2005). Creed focuses on the horror film's figuration of woman-as-monster. Creed argues that all human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine: 'of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject' (Creed 1999: 251). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the abject is defined as that which 'disturbs identity, system, order' and 'does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva 1982: 4). Ultimately, the abject is part of ourselves. We reject it, identifying it as that which we are not. Because of this, the abject may reveal as much about ourselves as it does about external reality. The abject both fascinates and horrifies because it reveals our own conceptions of the world and our normative disposition:

Monsters offer a negative definition of civility, virtue, and the good.  
Monsters help to reinforce boundaries between self and other,  
civilisation and barbarism, good and evil. (Devetak 2005:642)

Hence, the designation of others as monsters always serves a moral function. It thrives on ambiguity and the transgression of taboos and boundaries. Monsters, Devetak argues, symbolise deviance, madness, depravity, brutality, violence, and are through to threaten civilisation and social order (Devetak 2005: 633). Monsters, Creed argues, are what 'crosses or threatens to cross the "border", for example the border between... normal and abnormal gender behaviour' (Creed 2001: 11).

Creed also makes the point that our attitude to the monster is frequently ambivalent: although society teaches us to be morally appalled by its terrible deeds, rarely is the monster presented as wholly unsympathetic. Indeed, part of us takes delight in its actions and identifies with them. The abject terrifies us but fascinates us all the same. According to Creed, horror films attest to the audience's desire to confront 'sickening, horrific images', to witness the taboo, that which provokes shock and terror; then, once we have taken our fill, 'to throw up, throw out, eject the abject' (Creed 2001: 10). Thus, comments such as 'that made me feel sick' touch on this function of abjection in a literal sense. The depiction of the abject allows spectators to indulge in taboo forms of behaviour without having to act themselves, before order is finally restored. According to Creed, this is the horror film's central appeal. Similarly, I suggest that the depiction of the abject in its various disguises is also the central appeal of how mass media and popular culture construct gendered stories as it reformulates boundaries of appropriateness as well as what is considered natural. While the discourse of the *Monstrous-Feminine* concerns monstrosity in broad terms, there are two more specific discourses influencing representations of female agency in political violence and the writing of monsters: the *Deviant Womb* and the *Femme Castratrice*.

## **2.2 The Deviant Womb**

Here, I build on literature regarding empty wombs as well as the literature on cyborgs in order to conceptualise the discourse of the *Deviant Womb* as one way in which monstrous-femininity is constructed. First, the association between femininity and sexual reproduction is one of the dominant notions of gender identity. In this sense, maternity is usually recognised as 'natural', at the core of women's experience of themselves as gendered beings. Indeed,

Myra Hird argues, the ‘naturalness’ of motherhood is so stubborn as to render women’s actual experiences of childbirth and childrearing often immaterial (Hird 2003: 6). Because gendered bodies are homogenised, the link between femininity and sexual reproduction is ‘natural’ and childless women who deny their definitional gendered ‘essence’ are rendered deviant and/or denied adult status (Hird 2003: 8). I return to the denial of adult status in Chapter 7, here, I focus on the othering of the female subject.

In the horror film, female monstrosity is almost always discussed in terms of the Freudian idea of woman as man’s castrated other and nearly always depicted in relation to mothering and reproductive functions (Creed 2001).

Because the maternal body plays a key role in the construction of the abject, it has become the underlying image of all that is monstrous in the horror film, signifying that which threatens the stability of the Symbolic Order. (Chaudhuri 2006: 94)

But, as Creed emphasises, ‘woman is not, by her very nature, an abject being’. Rather, patriarchal ideology constructs her as such (Creed 2001: 83). Judith Butler argues that the foundation of sexual difference as maternal reproduction is no more than the truth effect of a ‘tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions (Butler 2006: 140). The maternal body is an effect of a discourse and performance that requires the ‘female body...to assume maternity as the essence of its self and the law of its desire’ (Butler 2006: 125). I refer to this discourse as the *Deviant Womb* and it encompasses female subjects who are written as monstrous because of a denial of their gendered ‘essence’. Thus, it can be women who choose not to have children, women who cannot have children or any subject who for some reason does not fit in with and, therefore, threaten the heteronormative way of life.

Monstrosity has also been discussed in relation to cyborgs, the boundary between what is considered human and what is considered non-human. In her 'Manifesto for Cyborgs', first published in the 1980s, Donna J. Haraway defines a cyborg as a 'cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction' (Haraway 2000: 50). Haraway argues that in the traditions of western science and politics, the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction and imagination (Haraway 2000: 51). Moreover, according to Jennifer Gonzalez, the image of the cyborg body functions as a site of condensations and displacement: 'It contains on its surface and in its fundamental structure the multiple fears and desires of a culture caught in the process of transformation' (Gonzalez 2000: 58). Gonzalez makes a distinction between organic and mechanical cyborgs: An organic cyborg can be defined as a monster of multiple species, whereas a mechanical cyborg can be considered a techno-human mixture or fusion (Gonzalez 2000: 58):

The body of the woman is not merely hidden inside the machine..., nor is the organic body itself a mechanical replica, rather the body and the machine are a singular entity. (Gonzalez 2000: 59-60)

Anne Balsamo argues that cyborgs, as simultaneously human and mechanical, disrupt notions of otherness as the notion of the human relies upon an understanding of the non-human (Balsamo 2000: 150). In this sense, cyborgs function to challenge the stability of human identity.

They fascinate us because they are not like us, and yet just like us. Formed through a radical disruption of other-ness, cyborg identity foregrounds the constructedness of otherness. Cyborgs alert us to the ways culture and discourse depend upon notions of 'the other' that are arbitrary and binary, and also shifting and unstable. Who or what gets

constructed as other becomes a site for the cultural contestation of meaning within feminist politics. (Balsamo 2000: 155)

The metaphor of cyborgs is about transgressions of boundaries and in this respect it is similar to the abject. I use the concept of the cyborg as the point of intersection, merger and boundary between human and machine. I discuss female monstrosity by using the concept of the (mechanical) cyborg body which can pass as human. As I demonstrate below, this is one way in which the discourse of the *Deviant Womb* produces stories of monsters.

### **2.3 The Femme Castratrice**

According to Cerwyn Moore, the concept of cruelty is under-theorised in global politics. In particular, this involves the relationship between cruelty, entertainment and amusement and the pleasurable aspect of killing (Moore 2010: 323). In this sub-section, I borrow another concept from Creed, the femme castratrice, in order to conceptualise a discourse which produces a particular type of monster in representations of female agency in political violence: a monster that enjoys and takes pleasure from participating in acts of political violence. Creed, whose work is psycho-analytic, discusses the idea of woman as man's castrated other. However, she also discusses the castrated woman's nemesis: the *Femme Castratrice*, who is the castrating woman. In films featuring the *Femme Castratrice*, it is the male body, not the female body, which bears the burden of castration. Here, the spectator is invited to identify with the avenging female castrator. It is the *Femme Castratrice* who controls the sadistic gaze and the male victim is her object (Creed 2001: 153). The castrating woman is not passive like the castrated woman. Instead, she represents an active monster. The *Femme Castratrice* is an all-powerful, all-destructive figure, who 'arouses a fear of castration



and death while simultaneously playing on a masochistic desire for death, pleasure and oblivion [in men]' (Creed 2001: 130). Thus, female subjects produced by the discourse of the *Femme Castratrice* do not only challenge traditional views of women as passive victims, but the Myth of Motherhood is also challenged as female perpetrators of violence, whose victims are male, takes pleasure in such violence. The *Femme Castratrice* is the subject and controls the gaze, whereas the males are the objects of her violence. Furthermore, crucially, this discourse encompasses elements of sadomasochism and therefore gives the discourse sexual undertones of domination. Hence, it is through ideas about sex, power and domination that monstrosity is produced within the discourse of the *Femme Castratrice*.

### 3. MONSTER STORIES: Perversions of Motherhood

In this section, I show how subjects in my empirical cases are positioned within, as well as performing, discourses of the *Monstrous-Feminine*, the *Deviant Womb* and the *Femme Castratrice*. Through such discourses, the subject hold agency, however, the subject is 'othered' and as such its agency is associated with 'unnatural' femininity. By writing the female subject with agency but as performing 'unnatural' femininity, these discursive practices instead function to reinforce 'natural' femininity by establishing a boundary between 'us'/'them' and 'natural'/'unnatural' femininity.

#### 3.1 Performing the *Monstrous-Feminine*

### Lynndie

We need to ask why, out of the thousands of photos that surfaced (and were made available to Congress), only the few highly sexualized photos were released to the public. (Marshall 2007: 52)

Lynndie England was constructed as a monster through sexual narratives. The initial reports usually mentioned that she was thought to be pregnant which reflected badly on her because in order to get pregnant England must have broken the rules:

Getting pregnant in combat theater is forbidden; soldiers are not deployed to such areas if they are pregnant. ‘That right there makes women look bad’ Carney says of the pregnancy. ‘Male soldiers do it, too, it’s just that they don’t get caught ‘cause they don’t get pregnant.’ (Duke, *Washington Post*, 19/09/04)

DEPRAVED US soldier Lynndie England disobeyed orders to **sneak off for sex** with her lover at the Iraq jail where they tortured prisoners... Private England, 21, was banned from leaving her quarters unescorted after being **caught in bed four times** with Specialist Charles Graner, 35... She is now seven months **pregnant** with his child. (Unattributed, *Sun*, 06/08/2004)

England was reprimanded three times for disobeying direct orders not to sleep with Graner, her boyfriend at the time (Zernike, *New York Times*, 27/05/2004). Her own alleged promiscuity, ‘proven’ by her pregnancy, was used to construct her as a monster. This was also emphasised during the two trials as England was heavily pregnant, a reminder of her indecent behaviour. In addition, the military prosecutors used footage of England engaging in sexual acts in order to construct her as a monster. The footage did not show her torturing prisoners:

Private England, wearing a maternity version of military camouflage, appeared to suppress a smile as investigators described a **videotape that showed her having sex** with Cpl. Charles Graner, who prosecutors say was a ringleader of the abuse and Private England says is the father of the child she is carrying. Her mother sat stern-faced in the observation gallery, her eyes darting from the witness stand to her daughter as an investigator described photographs of Private England **topless and engaged in what he called oral sex**. (Zernike, *New York Times*, 04/08/2004)

THE pregnant soldier accused of humiliating Iraqi prisoners was photographed performing **lewd acts** with fellow troops, a military hearing was told. Lynndie England was **pictured naked** by a pool, waving her breasts in front of a sleeping soldier and **performing a sex act** with a colleague. (Gardner, *Daily Mail*, 05/08/2004)

However, Lynndie England's alleged promiscuity was not only portrayed as directed towards her boyfriend at the time:

US senators who have viewed unpublished pictures from the prison say they show Lynndie England in **sex acts with numerous fellow soldiers**. 'Almost everybody was naked all the time,' a senator said. (Churcher, *Daily Mail*, 16/05/2004)

In the UK, headlines such as 'Baghdad jail **orgies**: Shamed GI **Lynndie had sex** in front of Iraqi prisoners', 'Lynndie's jail orgies' (Harwood, *Daily Mirror*, 14/05/2004) and 'Lynndie filmed a **sex orgy**' (Flynn, *Sun*, 14/05/2004) dominated the media coverage. England was portrayed as 'naked and **eagerly engaging in romps** with soldier pals' (Flynn, *Sun*, 14/05/2004) and a senator claimed that '**sex with numerous partners** seemed to be **consensual**' (Harwood, *Daily Mirror*, 14/05/2004). England's promiscuity was not even

limited to fellow male soldiers. She was also represented as a beast preying on the prisoners in her care:

Investigators are now probing claims that her unborn child was fathered when she **forced** an Iraqi **detainee** at Baghdad's notorious Abu Ghraib prison **into sex**... Insiders are now **doubting that Cpl Graner is the father** of her child... There were also questions of whether England was having sex with an Iraqi prisoner who could be the father of the child she's carrying. 'She definitely **had an eye for some of the better-looking guys being led around naked**.' (Nicks, *Daily Star*, 19/05/2004)

In the end, the charges of indecency bore a higher penalty than the charges for abuse (Zernike, *New York Times*, 07/08/2004). England's defence team argued that the charges regarding sexually explicit photographs were designed to distract attention from the real issue of widespread prisoner abuse by US forces in Iraq:

'They are intimate photographs of a young girl with her boyfriend at the time,' Mr Hernandez said. 'They are not something that had anything to do with prisoner abuse.' (Monaghan, *Times*, 04/08/2004)

Still, the existence of photos depicting England in sexual acts, or implying sexual acts, made her easy to frame as a whore, a monster of 'unnatural' femininity. She was even likened to a porn star:

In those pictures that have been printed, her facial expression is very often, as you might expect, a sneer, but the eyes are dark pools that don't even reflect the camera's flash. The eyes of Private England, **the woman tugging the leash around the neck of a naked Iraqi prisoner**, appear **empty of emotion**. The soldier smiles sadistically but her eyes, dark and devoid of empathy, emit as much emotion as a

**hardened actress in a porn film.** (Crichton, *Sunday Herald*, 09/05/2004)

I argue that Lynndie England was constructed as performing ‘unnatural’ femininity due to her alleged sexual promiscuity and activities. Because photos of a sexual nature already existed, England was easy to frame as a whore, a woman who had transgressed boundaries of appropriate behaviour. In turn, as a whore, England was easy to frame as a monster guilty of the prison abuse scandal.

The monster can also be created with regards to what it is not. As such, Lynndie England was often represented in relation to Jessica Lynch (mentioned in Chapter 4 and 5):

After all, the much-hailed Pfc. **Jessica Lynch**, that other iconic face from Iraq, also is from West Virginia, from a tiny place on the other side of the state called Palestine. But **one became a heroine; the other, a source of shame**, part of a crew of soldiers who somehow went over the edge and engaged in abuse like ‘something out of sport,’ as one witness described it during England’s hearings. (Duke, *Washington Post*, 19/09/04)

It’s almost too perfect. Two young working-class women from opposite ends of West Virginia go off to war. **One is blond and has aspirations to be a schoolteacher. The other is dark, a smoker, divorced and now carrying an out-of-wedlock baby.** One becomes the heroic poster child for Operation Iraqi Freedom, the subject of a hagiographic book and TV movie; the other becomes the hideous, leering face of American wartime criminality, Exhibit A in the indictment of our country’s descent into the gulag. In the words of Time magazine, Pfc. Lynndie England is ‘a **Jessica Lynch gone wrong.**’ (Rich, *New York Times*, 16/05/2004)

England's friends and family say she is similar to **Jessica Lynch**, another young woman from rural West Virginia who joined the military to broaden her horizons. When **Lynch's** Army unit was attacked during the war's early days, England's family says, the military and the news media inaccurately **created a heroine**. In **England's** case, they say, the same parties are creating **a villainess**. (Cauchon, Howlett and Hampson, *USA Today*, 07/05/2004)

Moreover, the fact that England was pregnant when the scandal broke also meant that the tension between identities of life-giving (Myth of Motherhood) and life-taking (agency in political violence) was highly visible: 'Pictures of the **pregnant** 21-year-old US Army reservist in Iraq's notorious Abu Ghraib jail have **shocked** the world' (Chandler, *Daily Star*, 09/05/2004). The pregnancy highlighted England's role as a life-giver, a woman, and this was in stark contrast to the activities depicted in the photos from Abu Ghraib:

England remains a **mystery**. Is she a torturer? A pawn? Another victim of the Iraq war? While the world weighed in, England said very little. (McKelvey, *Marie Claire*, 2006)

The images were as notorious as they were **shocking**: the young woman grinning and giving a thumbs-up sign beside a naked Iraqi detainee and leading another around on a dog leash. (Unattributed, *Times*, 04/05/2005)

SMIRKING out of the vile photographs of the bludgeoned and humiliated Iraqi prisoners is Private Lynndie England. Her presence adds **a peculiar horror** to the scenes of suffering and inhumanity she helped to orchestrate at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison. **Her wanton sadism denies the natural virtues of womanhood**: compassion, gentleness and the capacity to conciliate. What then, in the theatre of conflict in Iraq, could have so corrupted a young American woman

that she was willing to indulge in such savagery? (James, *Daily Mail*, 07/05/2004)

In the last example, the author asks ‘What turns a woman into a savage?’ and tries to understand how a woman, who is ‘naturally’ peaceful, could participate in such torture. How can ‘the brutality that Lynndie England seemed so eager to indulge in’ be explained? The author suggests that:

To prove their worth, many female soldiers, police officers or prison warders too easily shed the distinctions of their sex in a drive to be tougher, more aggressive, less forgiving than any of their male colleagues. To do otherwise, they imagine, is to appear weak and inferior. (James, *Daily Mail*, 07/05/2004)

The next day, the headline ‘The making of an **all-American monster**’ is accompanied with an article and two photos of Lynndie England illustrating the tension between Lynndie- the woman and Lynndie- the monster; the tension between ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ femininity (Knight, *Daily Mail*, 08/05/2004). Again, the confusion concerns how a woman as England could end up as a torturer:

The **enigma** is how a tomboyish, possibly stubborn, but by all accounts sweet-natured girl could have become involved in such atrocities? (Knight, *Daily Mail*, 08/05/2004)

Similarly, a commentary in the *Times* asks:

**What awful transgression has occurred to make a woman do this?**

In wars, as in civilian life, the overwhelming majority of sexual violence is committed by men against women. So that England, with her arm around her lover Charles Graner, thumbs up beside bodies kicked into obscene poses, is all the more **shocking**: a traitor, a

collaborator, Rose West to his Fred. Just how culpable was England, a booking-in clerk with no reason to be there except to visit Graner? Was she participating in the fun and games to please him, a man violent enough to stalk his ex-wife? (Turner, *Times*, 08/05/2004)

Many other faces have emerged, but England's remains **iconic**—and tragically so, considering that a child is coming into Lynndie England's embattled world, and considering that the **new mother** could end up in jail in a case that has polarized the nation. (Duke, *Washington Post*, 19/09/2004)

After England had given birth to her son, the media representations changed. England was now 'the mum': 'Pictures of **the mum** and other troops posing with naked Iraqis sparked a storm in 2003' (Unattributed, *Sun*, 03/05/2005); 'But Private Charles Graner, the **22-year-old mum's** former boyfriend, said HE placed the dog leash around the prisoner's neck and asked England to lead him out of his cell' (Smith, *Sun*, 05/05/2005); '**The mother of one** was convicted by a military jury on six of seven charges, including committing an indecent act and maltreatment of prisoners at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib jail' (Thompson, *Sun*, 27/09/2005). The headline in the *Sun* regarding the fact that Lynndie England had given birth to her son was: '**Torturer's Baby**' (Unattributed, *Sun*, 14/10/2004). Then again, on 29 October, 2004, another article titled '**Torturer's tot**' was published both in the *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* (Flynn, *Sun*; *Daily Mirror*, 29/10/2004). It seems England's identity as a mother was used in order to add drama to the representations. However, at the same time, the representations emphasise that England's performance of 'unnatural' femininity is an exception to the norm. Thus, the fascination with England's part in torture in combination with her motherhood, not only establishes the boundary between 'natural' and 'unnatural' femininity, but also function to emphasise 'natural' femininity in opposition to England's actions as the norm.



### Ulrike

Initially, Ulrike Meinhof publically argues against the use of force, but as *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* develops, she transforms into a perpetrator of political violence. She transgresses the boundary of ‘natural’ femininity by encouraging and participating in violent actions. Two scenes in particular show Ulrike transgressing that boundary. First, at the freeing of Baader, which is the first time Ulrike takes an active part as a member of the RAF, members of the group enter the building, fighting erupts and a policeman is shot. The music is fast, powerful and intense and increases both in volume and in keys leading to a climax whereupon Ulrike, who according to the plan was to act surprised and stay behind in order not to reveal her cover, follows the others and jumps out the window. Here, the window symbolises Ulrike’s new life. With the jump, she is now officially associated with the RAF and becomes the writer of the group’s political statements. She has chosen violence as a method for the struggle. The window in this sense symbolises the boundary of violence. By jumping out of the window she has transgressed the boundary. In the first political statement for the RAF, published in *Der Spiegel*, she motivates the use of force:

We say, the man in uniform is a pig, not a human being. That’s how we have to deal with him. This means we don’t talk to him and it’s wrong to talk to these people at all. And **of course it’s ok to shoot**. What we’re doing, and what we want to show is that armed struggle is possible, and it is possible to take action and win, and the other side does not win. So it’s important that they do not catch us. That is essential to our success.

In another statement, Ulrike writes:

We demand a stop of the bombing in Vietnam. We demand the withdrawal of American troops from Indochina. We demand the lifting of the mine blockade against North Vietnam.

Images of bombings at US military headquarters and police departments are shown as the statement is read out. Ulrike's voice continues:

We will continue to **carry out bombings** against judges and prosecutors until they cease violating the rights of political prisoners. Our demands on the justice system are not unreasonable. We have no other means to force them to comply.

Ulrike's transformation into a monster promoting political violence is also signified by her relationship to a man called Peter. When he hears about Ulrike's plan to take an active part in the freeing of Baader he protests: 'This is crazy!' Ulrike says: 'I have to do it'. I argue that the character of Peter is present in order to emphasise Ulrike's position at the crossroads and to highlight her transformation and subsequent transgression of the boundary. Peter represents Ulrike before she joins the RAF, politically active but against the use of force to achieve political goals. Another scene in which this is highlighted is during the RAF members training camp in Jordan. When the RAF members arrive, Ulrike is sitting next to Peter on the back of a truck. Soon afterwards, a fight between Andreas and Peter erupts and it seems that Ulrike must make a choice between which 'camp' to belong to, Andreas' or Peter's. The following conversation between Ulrike and Peter takes place in Jordan:

[Ulrike:] You want to go back, don't you?

[Peter:] (nods.)

[Ulrike:] So you're giving up?

[Peter:] These people are at war. What's that got to do with our situation in West Germany? You think you can start a revolution in Germany with a Kalashnikov?

[Ulrike:] West Germany is just one front. We fight oppression and injustice with our comrades around the world. I thought you knew that.

[Peter:] Then **why not start with your kids?** You've gone underground. **What is to become of them?**

[Ulrike:] (silence.)

Peter offers to take care of the children when he returns to Germany but Ulrike thinks it 'sounds a lot like betrayal'. Ulrike stands up and says: 'Take care of yourself' and walks off. This scene communicates that Ulrike's transformation is complete. She has left Peter and the 'old Ulrike' who believed in non-violent solutions behind. In addition, again it is Ulrike's motherhood that functions as the boundary between violence and non-violence, the ultimate sacrifice of abandoning one's own children is juxtaposed with agency in political violence. By choosing violence, Ulrike's life-giving role as a mother is questioned and later sacrificed. Ultimately, what is communicated is that the identities of life-giving and life-taking cannot co-exist.

### Faye

Faye Turney was written as a monster through the discourse of the *Monstrous-Feminine* in three main ways: by having left her daughter behind, by selling her story to the media and by being ridiculed in relation to the experience and sacrifice of 'true heroines'. First, the capture of Turney led to a debate in British media regarding whether or not mothers, or indeed

women, should be allowed to serve in the military, in particular in combat roles. The *Times* asked 'Should a mother join the Navy? Whatever your thoughts, post them below.' The article discussed a blog called 'Alpha Mummy': "'Alpha Mummy" is furious that the sailor has not put her child ahead of her own career and ambitions' (Unattributed, *Times*, 29/03/2007). Simply by being a woman and a mother, Faye Turney was considered selfish and, thus, a deviant mother:

What in God's name was Faye Turney doing in those God-forsaken waters in the first place? Why was a 25-year-old mother with a three-year-old daughter putting her life and her freedom at risk? Was it in the name of equality? Because if it was, it's a pretty hollow cause when a child's future is at stake. Was she being **selfish** in doing a potentially dangerous job to satisfy her own personal needs? And if her career is so important, why have a baby at 22 when both she and husband, Adam, are both in the Navy. If, as some feminists have raged, it's because 21st Century woman has the right to do whatever job she chooses - then, I'm sorry, I disagree. (Malone, *Sunday Mirror*, 01/04/2007)

I have to wonder what was she doing there, **risking** not just her own life but **the motherhood of an infant child**. Amid the relief that we will feel when she eventually returns, it still has to be asked why we are sending young mothers to a war zone of our own creation. Britain cannot be so short of military personnel that such women should be permitted - nay, encouraged - to go **gadding around** the world's most dangerous and volatile waterway. Call me old-fashioned but I think it is wholly wrong to separate a young mother from her child, put a gun in her hands and send her off to the Gulf ... The strain on this young woman must be intolerable. And she should not be under such strain, because she **should not have been there** in the first place. The person I feel sorry for in this appalling situation is little Molly, the wean that

Mrs Turney **left behind** ... A diplomatic solution to this fiasco must swiftly be found. A solution to the moral issue of mother-and-child relationships in the armed services will take rather longer. (Routledge, *Daily Mirror*, 30/03/2007)

Similar arguments were printed in the *Times* ('A mother's place isn't in the war zone' by Jill Kirby, 01/04/2007) and in the *Daily Mail* ('Isn't a mother's first duty to her children?' by Jill Parkin, 30/03/2007). Parkin argues:

No matter how we dress it up, men are always going to be better in battle and, if we're being honest, less vital to the children than mothers... It may be politically incorrect to say so but for young children, the **loss of a mother** is likely to be **worse than the loss of a father**. In the end, that's what we're thinking about when we look at those pictures of Faye Turney at home before her capture, cuddling her baby. We're talking about the possibility of a **motherless child**. All this in the name of what is called 'equality' but which is actually a misguided belief that men and women are the same. But we are not. (Parkin, *Daily Mail*, 30/03/2007)

Routledge writes that 'the strain on this woman must be intolerable' implying that Faye Turney, because she is a mother, is more deeply affected than men in a similar situation (Routledge, *Daily Mirror*, 30/03/2007). Captain Anthea Burdus gave the following counter-argument:

We join the armed forces with our eyes open. The fact you are a mum makes no difference. There are a lot of fathers doing the same job. People always ask the same question 'How do you cope?' And I think 'Do you ask the men?' I have seen a lot of men away from their children for the first time who find it terribly, terribly hard. (Judd, *Independent*, 01/04/2007)

Similarly, Sue Carroll argued:

Anyone who wonders how a 25-year-old married mother of a three-year-old daughter could contemplate serving on the front line should ask the same of her male colleagues, many of them married with children. (Carroll, *Daily Mirror*, 04/04/2007)

Interviewed in the *Daily Mirror*, Britain's first female fighter pilot Jo Salter tried to explain why women want to be on the front line, even if they are mothers:

If there was ever a national emergency, and all the reserves were called up to fight, I wouldn't hesitate to sign up again even though it would mean leaving my children behind. Serving your country is more than a job – it's a life, a belief system of honour and loyalty. (McCaffrey, *Daily Mirror*, 07/04/2007)

What is interesting about the fact that the capture of Faye Turney ignited a debate whether or not women should be allowed in combat roles is how quickly the debate turned from a mother's role to a woman's role. Although temporarily, Turney had given up her role as a mother in order to serve as a soldier. She was represented as having left her daughter behind as this caption to an image of Faye and her daughter shows:

**Left behind:** Faye Turney in 2003 with daughter Molly, who is at home with Faye's husband Adam. (Salkeld, *Daily Mail*, 28/03/07)

Faye Turney was also compared to a British climber who died scaling K2:

Faye Turney risks being put in the same category as Alison Hargreaves, the British climber. Accused of selfishly putting her career before her family, Hargreaves died scaling K2 and left behind two young children. (Thomson, *Daily Telegraph*, 29/03/2007)

Being a mother, Turney was portrayed as selfish for wanting a career, for risking her own life and careless for risking her daughter becoming motherless. In these discursive practices, Turney had transgressed the boundary of appropriate femininity and was, thereby, disrupting the Myth of Motherhood.

In addition, Faye Turney was also written as a monster in comparison to other female British soldiers. At the time of the hostages' release, two female British soldiers were killed in Basra, Iraq. As a result, Faye Turney was represented in relation to them. Having paid the ultimate price, being killed, the two women were portrayed as 'HEROINES' as a front page of the *Daily Mail* picturing the two women read (Seamark and English, *Daily Mail*, 07/04/2007). Turney's experience and heroism paled in comparison. In addition, in a rare attempt to control the media, the Ministry of Defence allowed the sailors and marines involved in the hostage taking to sell their stories to the news media. Turney was offered close to £100,000 to tell about 'her ordeal' in the *Sun* and in a television interview with ITV's Trevor McDonald. However, as she accepted the deal, she was turned into a monster of a different kind, a greedy monster:

The two sailors [Turney and Barchelor], pawns in a military, political and media game, were vilified for dishonouring their uniforms. The welcome home had suddenly turned nasty. (Judd, *Independent*, 14/04/2007)

In comparison to what other soldiers were going through, Faye Turney's experience was ridiculed as she had been treated fairly well (the captives even received 'goody bags' from the Iranians). One commentary in the *Daily Telegraph* was titled: 'Faye a heroine? That's an insult to our dead soldiers' (Moir, *Daily Telegraph*, 11/04/2007). In addition, families of soldiers who had died in Iraq expressed that their sons or daughters were the true heroes and

heroines; they were true patriots serving their country who never would have accepted any money for their story (Chapman, Greenhill and Koster, *Daily Mail*, 10/04/2007). This is how Faye Turney was written as a monster through the discourse of the *Monstrous-Feminine*.

### Janis

When the images of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal became public, Janis Karpinski was the only higher ranking officer to be named and pictured, whereas other higher ranking officials were anonymous:

The military is considering action against Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, the senior officer at the prison when the abuse occurred against 20 detainees in November and December. **Pentagon officials** said Friday that no final action had been determined. **General Karpinski and other officers** who are the subjects of the inquiry are now in a stage of the military legal process where they are allowed to write responses to the investigators' findings. (Shanker and Steinberg, *New York Times*, 01/05/2004)

The highest-ranking officer to be suspended was Army Reserve Brig. Gen. Janis L. **Karpinski**, commander of the 800th Military Police Brigade. (Chan and Spinner, *Washington Post*, 30/04/2004)

Karpinski was in charge of all U.S. military prisons in Iraq last October when prison guards began abusing Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad. **Top Army officials** have criticized Karpinski's performance in the wake of a scandal that has resulted in criminal charges against seven guards, one of whom has pleaded guilty. Seven more soldiers have received career-threatening reprimands. (Moniz and Morrison, *USA Today*, 25/05/2004)



The article in *USA Today* is also accompanied with a photo of Karpinski with the caption: ‘Under scrutiny: Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski commanded the 800th Military Police Brigade in Iraq until Monday’. Again, Karpinski is named whereas ‘Top Army officials’ are not (Moniz and Morrison, *USA Today*, 25/05/2004). The *Daily Mail* reported on the ‘Torture jail General’ who ‘may be kicked out of the Army’:

THE U.S. general at the centre of the Iraqi PoW torture scandal faces being thrown out of the army in disgrace. General Karpinski, who was the only U.S. female commander in Iraq, has denied knowing anything about the torture and claims she is being made a scapegoat to cover up for intelligence chiefs who ordered soldiers to ‘soften up’ the Iraqis prior to interrogation. (Shears, *Daily Mail*, 04/05/2004)

This article is accompanied with a photo of Karpinski and the caption: ‘Carpeted: General Janis Karpinski says the US commander in Iraq should also bear responsibility’ (Shears, *Daily Mail*, 04/05/2004). In an interview with the *Times*, Karpinski describes the moment news about the images were released:

There were the photographs and there, too, was footage of herself. A general was saying: ‘This is Janis Karpinski the commander, and these are her soldiers.’ (de Bertodano, *Times*, 13/08/2004)

The media subsequently reported on her failure as a leader as outlined in the Taguba report:

Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba, author of the internal Pentagon report on prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison by Army Reserve military police, said it was a ‘failure in leadership’ from Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski on down. He said there was ‘no training, no supervision.’ (Moniz, *USA Today*, 12/05/2004)

I argue that by naming Karpinski only, as well as informing the readers about that she is female, her identity as a woman became associated with the images of abuse, whereas other officials, the majority of which were men, remained anonymous and, thereby, avoided responsibility. Simply by being female, Karpinski differed from the stereotypical military General and was, consequently, easier to frame as a scapegoat. The fact that a woman was in charge of those soldiers pictured in photos of sexual abuse added to the shock factor of the Abu Ghraib scandal.

### **3.2 Performing the *Deviant Womb***

#### Nasima

In *Britz*, Nasima is constructed as a monster through the discourse of the *Deviant Womb*; as a cyborg body faking motherhood. Nasima is faking motherhood because the explosives that are strapped on her belly in the final scenes make her look pregnant. In addition, she wears a maternity suit which functions to hide the explosives. The suit not only covers the explosives on her belly but also her breasts; it makes them larger, more realistic of a pregnant woman. This gives Nasima a softer appearance, as human and womanly as possible. The maternity suit makes Nasima look heavily pregnant. It makes her look like an occupied womb symbolising life-giving. However, Nasima is deceptive. Her identity of life-giving is an illusion. Instead, her identity is one of life-taking. Nasima is using motherhood as a political strategy in order to achieve her political goal of life-taking. Discussing ‘Kiddy’, a 1990s comic series character, Jennifer Gonzales states:

She is an 'exotic' and vindictive cyborg who passes-as simply human. It is when she removes her skin that she becomes the quintessential cyborg body. For in the Western imagery, this body is all about revealing its internal mechanism...Her 'real' identity lies beneath the camouflage of her dark skin-rather than on its surface. (Gonzalez 2000: 70)

Similarly, Nasima passes as 'simply human'. Instead, it is what is hidden beneath, not her skin in this case, but her clothing, that reveals her true identity as a cyborg, a monster, part human, part machine, a woman yet a bomb, a female perpetrator of violence.

While Nasima is constructed as a monster and a cyborg body, the Myth of Motherhood is communicated in a more subtle way in the scene where Nasima puts the bomb and the maternity suit on. From cinema studies we learn that how a shot is composed and framed is its *mise-en-scène*. How the shot is cut together into a sequence or scene is known as a montage (Rowley 2009: 316). As Nasima straps the explosives on, there are many short close-ups of her belly. In these shots, Nasima's head is cut off. According to Jean Mitry:

The object presented in close-up inevitably draws attention to its perceptible qualities, to everything which makes it different. It appeals to the emotions but these can only be felt, experienced by seeing it... The close-up thereby presents a tactile, sensual impression of objects. It concentrates on the object, on its forms, all the recognitive and dynamogenic operations relating to the knowledge we have of it; and this before it makes any appeal to the intellect... Of all shots, it is the most concrete, most objective through what it shows, the most abstract, most subjective through what it signifies. (Mitry 2000: 67, 68)

The close-ups on the bomb as Nasima straps it on, therefore, denote depersonification. The bomb is the object which is magnified, appears relatively large and fills the entire frame to

focus attention and emphasise its importance. The bomb is the main character, Nasima has transformed into the mechanical cyborg. As a cyborg, the body and the machine have become a singular entity.

The tension is also played out when Nasima is performing motherhood during the walk towards the place for her attack. She is holding her hands on her 'pregnant' belly, appearing to be protecting life. However, this performance of motherhood is deceitful and part of the strategy. Instead, it is Nasima's performance of motherhood when she has successfully strapped the bomb on that more powerfully communicates the Myth of Motherhood. Nasima touches her 'belly' as a pregnant woman would do and looks at herself in the mirror. She puts the maternity suit on and looks in the mirror again. In cinema studies, the affective relationships between audience and film have often been invoked by referring to Jacques Lacan and the 'mirror stage' (Mitry 2000: 193). To Lacan, the primary distinction between self and other is founded on identification with an image. According to Mitry, the mirror state makes it easier to be conscious of the self, but it is not essential (Mitry 2000: 196). Thus, the portrayal of Nasima looking at herself in a mirror is a way of showing the audience that Nasima identifies with herself as a life-taker, she is conscious of the self she has become. However, the inclusion of the mirror also means that her feelings are reflected out to the audience. In cinema studies, mirrors can function to signify ambiguity or duplicity (Hayward 1996: 4). I argue that the construction of Nasima as a monster is ordered by the discourse of the *Deviant Womb* because Nasima has not taken up her proper gender role as a mother. Nasima's female body has failed to assume maternity; it has failed in its identity of life-giving and, therefore, departs from norms about 'natural' femininity. The inclusion of the mirror in the scene where Nasima is faking motherhood, therefore, emphasises the inherent ambiguity or tension in representations of female agency in political violence. It emphasises Nasima as

both (seemingly) life-giving and life-taking and it illuminates the boundary of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ femininity. In this scene, the background music intensifies slightly when Nasima is looking at herself in the mirror which enhances the emotional communication of the scene. To sum up, in these discursive practices, Nasima, the subject, performs the discourse of the *Deviant Womb* and as such disrupts notions about ‘natural’ femininity. This is how the subject becomes the abject and is written as monstrous.

### Janis

In the initial media coverage of Janis Karpinski it is often mentioned that she has a husband of 29 years, but that they have no children:

Karpinski understands the trials of separation. She has **no children**, but her husband of 29 years, a lieutenant colonel, works with the US embassy in Oman. [She] has not seen him in recent months. Her blond hair is braided and coiled in a tight bun; her ice blue eyes, devoid of makeup, fix listeners with a friendly, if unflinching gaze. (Taylor Martin, *St. Petersburg Times*, 14/12/2003)

The information regarding her childlessness immediately puts focus on that Karpinski is different. The fact that she is married signifies heterosexuality, but ‘childless’ separates her from ‘normal’ women. I argue that the discourse of the *Deviant Womb* writes Karpinski as, if not monstrous, at least different or deviant. By choosing not to have children, Karpinski has denied herself a life-giving identity. Countering the representation of herself as deviant because of her childlessness, Karpinski defends her choice not to have children in her autobiography:

Choosing a military life did require sacrifices. My husband and I **decided we would not have children**. As career Army people, we were always on the move and often flying off to different assignments. Even when we were based together, as a Special Forces officer George spent most of his life in the field. If we had kids, I knew I would have to take most of the responsibility for raising them. But I could not do that and also meet the responsibilities of a full-time officer in the Army. I also needed George's calmer temperament to make me a better person; his parenting skills would have exceeded mine...but I couldn't ask him to become my househusband. (Karpinski with Strassner 2005: 82)

The discourse of the *Deviant Womb* constructs Karpinski as acting outside the boundary of 'natural' femininity as she has not taken up a woman's 'natural' role of as a life-giver. The focus on Karpinski as childless constructs her as different and the fact that she defends her decision not to have children in her autobiography highlights the break with 'natural' femininity. However, at the same time, the focus on Karpinski's childlessness emphasises the tension between life-giving and life-taking identities. Karpinski has sacrificed motherhood for her career. She has sacrificed her life-giving identity for her life-taking identity. Similarly as shown in Chapter 5, the message that is communicated is that these two identities are not compatible. This is how Janis Karpinski is written as monstrous or different.

### 3.3 Performing the *Femme Castratrice*

Lynndie

When photos from the Abu Ghraib prison first became public, images of Lynndie England were prominent.<sup>21</sup> Among the first photos to be released was one in which England is pointing at the genitals of a naked Iraqi prisoner with a cigarette in her mouth. When more photos were released, it was one in which England is holding a leash attached to an Iraqi prisoner's neck while he is lying on the floor that dominated the media coverage (Marks, *Scotsman*, 07/05/2004). The 'leash-photo' made it onto newspapers' front pages with titles such as 'Treated like a dog' (Unattributed, *Daily Mail*, 07/05/2004) and '**Witch: Evil** soldier Lynndie in new torture photo' (Flynn, *Sun*, 07/05/2004). Moreover, it was the fact that England seemed to be smiling in the photos that created much fury:

[T]he same **smiling face** is splashed across newspapers and on television screens around the world and that patriotic scene at the family home in Fort Ashby, West Virginia, has been substituted by one of stunned shame... **one of the most reviled faces in recent history**... In one, sporting the same impish grin, she aims a make-believe rifle at the **genitals of naked and hooded** Iraqi detainees. (Knight, *Daily Mail*, 08/05/2004)

In others, she **grinned** and gave a thumbs-up sign next to **humiliated naked** and hooded Iraqi **men**. (Chandler, *Daily Star*, 09/05/2004)

Lynndie England, 'the grinning face in the graphic images of abuse from Abu Ghraib prison' (Goldenberg, *Guardian*, 03/05/2005), became a symbol of everything that was wrong with the war in Iraq. Her 'grin' became 'the symbol of sadistic practices at Abu Ghraib prison' (Goldenberg, *Guardian*, 08/05/2004). Morley Safer, correspondent for 60 Minutes said: 'We now have the new symbol of this war. It is no longer the picture of Saddam's statue tipping over – it's a girl with an Iraqi on a leash' (Horovitz, Grossman and Johnson, *USA Today*,

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<sup>21</sup> According to the *Sunday Herald*, Lynndie England was depicted in five of fourteen initial images. The title of the article discussing Lynndie England's visibility is 'the picture that lost the war' (Mackay, *Sunday Herald*, 02/05/2004).

10/05/2004). She was ‘A new **monster in chief**’ and ‘the latest **hate figure** to help obscure the bigger picture’ (Riddell, *Observer*, 09/05/2004). According to BBC News, the photos of England were ‘images that will haunt America’s occupation of Iraq’ and ‘it is Lynndie **England’s face most linked to the horror**’ (Myrie, BBC news, 08/05/2004).

The initial representations of Lynndie England segmented and in the continuous coverage she was commonly referred to as ‘the woman with the leash’; ‘the pointer’; and ‘the grinning-face’ (Zernike, *New York Times*, 04/08/2004). She was also referred to as ‘**the** Iraq abuse girl’ even though there were more women involved (Unattributed, *Daily Mirror*, 30/04/2005) and ‘Dog lead Lynndie’ (Boffey, *Daily Mirror*, 03/05/2005). I argue that England was constructed as a monster through the discourse of the *Femme Castratrice*; a sadist who takes pleasure in torturing her male victims. Because of the smiles, England was depicted as having an ‘evident taste for cruelty’ (Goldenberg, *Guardian*, 08/05/2004):

It is England’s **smile**, beaming as she holds a humiliated Iraqi prisoner on a leash or points an imaginary gun at the **genitals of naked detainees**, that has provided the **most shocking images** from the album of horrors at Abu Ghraib. (Watson and Farrell, *Times*, 08/05/2004)

In the *Times*, one commentary reflected on what made Lynndie England participate, asking whether she was forced into it. The conclusion was that she was not: ‘England’s **face - enthusiastic, amused, triumphant** - does not, however, reflect someone dragged into **sadistic sex play**’ (Turner, *Times*, 08/05/2004).<sup>22</sup> England seemed to be participating freely. She is the *Femme Castratrice*. Later, when details of what England first told investigators were published, it was the fact that she ‘was having fun’ that was most upsetting:

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<sup>22</sup> The author also reflected over whether or not it was England’s underwear that was draped over an Iraqi’s face in another photo.



In a sworn statement to investigators, Pfc. Lynndie England explained the mystery of why soldiers at Abu Ghraib took pictures of detainees masturbating and piled naked with plastic sandbags over their heads by saying, 'We thought it **looked funny** so pictures were taken.' (Zernike, *New York Times*, 16/05/2004)

Private Lynndie England told investigators that the pictures were taken 'while they were joking around, **having some fun**, working the nightshift.' (Unattributed, *Daily Mail*, 04/08/2004)

In the *Sun*, one headline read '**Torture fun**':

**CRUEL** American soldier Lynndie England has told how Iraqi inmates were forced to wear women's panty pads and crawl through broken glass... Pregnant England- sent home in disgrace after being pictured torturing Iraqis- also admitted the cruelty was **carried out for FUN**. Asked by army investigators in North Carolina who knew of the abuse, she said: 'Everyone in the company, from the commander down. We thought it **looked funny**, so pictures were taken.' She described the horrific abuse as 'basically us **fooling around**'. (Unattributed, *Sun*, 19/05/2004)

Most news coverage regarding Lynndie England's 'fun' at Abu Ghraib mentioned that she was smiling in the photos, that her victims were male and depicted naked and that she was pregnant with the child of the alleged ring-leader (Monaghan, *Times*, 31/08/2004; Harwood, *Daily Mirror*, 07/05/2004). That England was torturing 'for fun' was also the military prosecutors' main argument during her trials months later. As a result, the representation of England as the *Femme Castratrice*, enjoying, laughing and smiling while torturing her male victims, continued:

They [the military prosecutors] argued that since England did not work at the cellblock where most of the prisoner abuse occurred and

visited it despite orders to stay away, 'It's clear Pfc. England was not an MP. She was not recruited into a secret military mission as the defence would have you believe. She **was there to have some fun.**' (Parker, *USA Today*, 01/09/2004)

'The accused knew what she was doing,' said Capt. Chris Graveline, the lead prosecutor. 'She was **laughing and joking.** ... She is **enjoying,** she is participating, all for her own sick humour.' (Unattributed, *USA Today*, 26/09/2005)

A military prosecutor said England humiliated prisoners because she **enjoyed it** and had a sick sense of humour. (Thompson, *Sun*, 27/09/2005)

By focusing on her smile in the photos, the fact that her victims were naked males and the use of the leash, I argue, Lynndie England was constructed a monster through the discourse of the *Femme Castratrice* both when the photos became public, during investigations and during her trials. Because of the smiles, England seemed to take pleasure in torture. The sexual sadomasochistic undertones of the discourse of the *Femme Castratrice* were, furthermore, made visible with references to the leash and the fact that her victims were naked males. Lynndie England became the 'sex sadist of Baghdad' (Brittain 2006: 86).

In order to counter representations of England as a monster and to re-write England as a 'normal' woman, England's defence team used her pregnancy and emotions of maternal guilt:

**Appealing** to the jury **as a mother**, Private England described her fear after the photos of the mistreatment became public. She said she was scared she would be sent to prison, separated from her young son, whose father is Private Graner. 'I was **scared I'd have to leave him** and he wouldn't know me when I returned, and he **wouldn't view me**

as **his mother**, he'd view me as a stranger,' she said. (Cloud, *New York Times*, 28/09/2005)

England, a reservist in the US Army, talked at length about how the child, who bears a striking resemblance to Graner, **had changed her life**. (Unattributed, *Times*, 28/09/2005)

In this sense, Lynndie England's experience of being a mother has changed her life, the argument goes. She is not a monster capable of torture and abuse. Instead, through her 'natural' maternal insights she has realised her right priorities. The maternal insights are also prominent in the *Vanity Fair* article: 'Lynndie England: a Soldier, a Mother - and a Court-Martial'. The sub-heading reads: 'With a 7-month-old boy to care for, the Abu Ghraib Private **admits her guilt**' (Rockey Fleming, *People*, 16/05/2005). The article suggests that because England is a mother she realises and admits her guilt in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. The association of a mother's feeling and guilt communicates that even for England, the monster, participation in what happened at Abu Ghraib was 'unnatural'. Becoming a mother has made England explore her 'natural' femininity and, as a result, she feels emotions of guilt.

Furthermore, even though Lynndie England finished serving her punishment years ago, it seems we are still obsessed to hear her story. In 2009, five years after the images became public, the BBC radio conducted two separate lengthy interviews with her and an interview in the *Guardian* was introduced as:

In 2004, photographs of abuses at Abu Ghraib shocked the world. Seven people were charged, but the **face of the scandal will always be Lynndie England**, the 21-year-old private **grinning** at the camera. (Brockes, *Guardian*, 03/01/09)

Despite the fact that investigations and most recently, the documentary *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), has shown that England's role in the abuse was minor in comparison to what actually took place during interrogations which was not captured on camera, and that blame should have been shared amongst a larger group of people, higher ranking officers as well as military intelligence officers, we are still obsessed with Lynndie England. In particular, we are still obsessed with her smile as this remark in an interview with BBC radio 4 highlights: 'You **look happy** in the photographs...', the reporter asks. England replies: 'It is just like smile for the camera, it is for the person holding the camera' (BBC Radio 4, 30/05/2009). The obsession with England also concerns the emotions of guilt and regret:

In her first interview in three years Lynndie England talks about Abu Ghraib, about Charles Graner, about **guilt**, her current life - and the role of the Bush administration. (Unattributed, *Stern*, 19/03/2008)

Mrs. England, we've listened to you for hours. And the whole time we've been asking ourselves: **Where is your feeling of regret?** (Unattributed, *Stern*, 19/03/2008)

In a radio interview for Special edition of Outlook with the BBC world service, Lynndie England is asked: 'Do you **feel sorry** for the prisoners?' England does not want to answer the question. The journalist continues: 'But you do have **regrets?**' England responds: 'I can't change what happened. I believe everything happens for a reason. To me the reason that I was there with Graner was that I would have my son' (BBC Outlook, 04/02/2009). In yet another radio interview with the BBC during 2009, England is asked: 'Do you accept that what you did was **wrong?**' England replies:

Still, five years later, I believe that we were told to do this. Yes, the acts themselves were wrong, but in the military you do what you are being told to do. Yes, we could have said something. Graner actually

told both his Platoon Sergeant and Platoon Leader, but they said, just do whatever they say. (BBC Radio 4, 30/05/2009)

After the interview, the radio hostess and the studio guest discussed what Lynndie England had said. The hostess found 'the complete lack of remorse' the most disturbing whereas the guest highlighted that England did not see the prisoners as individuals. Next, I discuss what purpose such an obsession with monsters fulfils; how 'natural' femininity is emphasised even in monster stories portraying 'unnatural' femininity.

## 5. CONCLUSION: Emphasising 'natural' femininity

In this concluding section, I show how stories of monsters serve the purpose of emphasising 'natural' femininity even though the monster itself disrupts notions of 'natural' femininity and the Myth of Motherhood. As mentioned in Chapter 5, female agency in political violence can be allowed if the subject is acting out of a minority and cultural exception. In this chapter, however, the subject has not only transgressed boundaries of 'natural' femininity but has disrupted ideas about what 'natural' means. This is why the subject is written as abject and a monster. As shown above, the creation of monsters through the discourses of the *Monstrous-Feminine*, the *Deviant Womb* and the *Femme Castratrice* is intimately linked with motherhood. Due to the close connection between 'natural' femininity and motherhood, there is also a link between 'unnatural' femininity and monstrosity and this is why I argue that monster stories are told as perversions of motherhood.

The discourse of the *Monstrous-Feminine* organises stories of monsters in a broad way as female subjects are different to the norm of 'natural' femininity. This is how Faye Turney was constructed as monstrous for having, albeit temporarily, given up her role as a mother. In this discursive context, Turney is monstrous because she has selfishly left her daughter behind. At the same time, anonymous male soldiers who temporarily leave their children behind in order to serve their country tend not to be written as monsters because they are not doing anything 'unnatural'. In this sense, motherhood is made visible whereas fatherhood is not. Similarly, the positioning of Gudrun and Ulrike in *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* was negotiated through motherhood where sacrificing/abandoning motherhood was linked to agency in violence. While Gudrun's abandonment of her son is unproblematic due to the fact that she is written as the masculinised subject, Ulrike's transformation into someone capable of committing violent acts takes place through her sacrifice of motherhood. Thus, again, motherhood is made visible whereas fatherhood, in this case through Andreas Baader's fatherhood, is not. Furthermore, when Janis Karpinski was named and pictured and, thereby, identified as female in the initial coverage of the Abu Ghraib scandal, she was written as a monster because she was associated with the content of the images, which in itself was in tension with 'natural' and appropriate femininity. Moreover, the discourse of the *Monstrous-Feminine* organises stories of Lynndie England in two ways: through sexual narratives and maternal narratives. By writing her as sexually deviant she was associated with inappropriate femininity and by being pregnant during her trials, the 'unnaturalness' of England's agency became apparent resulting in that the tension between life-giving (Myth of Motherhood) and life-taking (agency in political violence) identities captured much of the media focus. More specifically, England was also written as a monster through the discourse of the *Femme Castratrice*. This is shown by the emphasis on that she was taking part in acts of torture 'for

fun', but also demonstrated by the obsession with her smile in the photos. England was also written as a monster through the *Femme Castratrice* because her victims were naked, male and because one naked male was seemingly dragged on a leash. This all plays into the sadomasochistic undertones of sex, power and domination present in the discourse of the *Femme Castratrice*.

Both Janis Karpinski and Nasima are written as monstrous through the discourse of the *Deviant Womb* by not taking up their roles as mothers. In addition, Nasima is performing the discourse of the *Deviant Womb* because she is faking motherhood in order to achieve her political goal. Through the idea of the cyborg body Nasima is part human part machine. She is seemingly both life-giving and life-taking.

I argue that, in line with the theorisation of the monster and the abject discussed above, the obsession with the monster has more to do with how we view ourselves than the monster itself. Feinman argues that 'when we only ask questions about women, when we are only appalled and confused by women soldiers' acts of brutality, we continue to cast women as victims and men as brutes' (Feinman 2007: 66). In contrast, I argue that the writing of the monster fulfils the purpose of defining what we are not. Because the 'othering' of the monster is deeply intertwined with our understanding of ourselves, as the monster shows us what we are not, I argue that representations of monsters are used as a way of identifying what we, as a larger collective, are not. Through interpellation, unconscious ideologies call upon us *not* to identify with the monster, but at the same time, we need the monster to exist because it is intimately linked with what we are. The monster shows us what we are not and where the boundary is drawn. By being defined in relation to an 'other' representing 'unnatural' femininity, 'natural' femininity is also communicated. This is how, on a meta-level, 'natural'

femininity is emphasised by our obsession with monsters. The ‘othering’ of the monster shows us what we are not and where the boundary of ‘natural’/‘unnatural’ femininity lies. In this sense, the monster story functions to police ‘natural’ femininity. Hence, even though the monster itself seems to challenge gendered binaries constituted by the Myth of Motherhood and seems to resist or disrupt notions of ‘natural’ femininity, stories of monsters overall still function to emphasise ‘natural’ femininity as that which is different from the monster. This is how the Myth of Motherhood is communicated in monster stories.



## Chapter 7

# **VICTIMS: Inversions of Motherhood**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In addition to constructions of monsters and heroines, representations of female agency in political violence are also presented in the form of victim stories. Crucially, however, in these stories the female subjects are actually denied agency. In this chapter, I explore the way in which subjects are denied agency and argue that motherhood is central to this process. In the first section, I theorise victims by discussing two discourses that influence representations of female agency in political violence: *Vulnerability* and *Emotionality*. I argue that there are two main ways in which female subjects are represented as victims through the *Vulnerability* discourse: either by being the passive object of the story rather than the active subject or by being portrayed as less than adult with a lack of authority. Because of this, I argue that stories of victims are inversions of motherhood. The *Emotionality* discourse writes the female subject as emotional which in these discursive structures of meaning is associated with weakness as explained in Chapter 4. Here, personal relationships are emphasised and/or the female subject is written as a victim of her own emotions. In the following section, I discuss how characters in my empirical cases are written as victims through the discourses mentioned. In the concluding section, I argue that the writing of female subjects as victims functions to emphasise ‘natural’ femininity because victimhood is an appropriate ‘space’ for females

according to traditional ideas about gender, agency and political violence. Thus, by writing the female subject as a victim, its life-taking identity is 'removed' and agency in political violence is denied. Consequently, instead, the Myth of Motherhood is communicated.

## 2. THEORISING VICTIMS

### 2.1 *Vulnerability*

As explained in Chapter 4, in traditional narratives of war, men make war and women keep the peace; men go to the front and women stay at home; men fight and women are fought for (Cooke 1996: 80). In this war story, man is constructed as violent and aggressive and woman as nonviolent and pacifist. Because of these categorisations, women are seen as incapable of protecting themselves, and this subsequently serve as the grounds on which to persuade men to exercise their masculinity and defeat the enemy; they are the reason why men fight (Kumar 2004: 298). Women become at once the victims of war and the causes for war. Jean Bethke Elshtain termed this relationship the myth of protection (Elshtain 1995: 4), I use this conceptualisation to formulate the discourse of *Vulnerability*.

According to the discourse of *Vulnerability*, the most prominent role that women can play is that of the victim. Women can suffer rape, torture or death during war, giving the male soldier the special duty to protect her from such consequences (Kumar 2006: 297). The binary constructions of war stories in this way proclaim that the sex segregation is justified for biological reasons: the men are strong, therefore, they must protect the women who are weak. It is written in their genes that men shall be active and women passive; men are the subjects

and women are the objects represented as being acted upon (Cooke 1996: 16; Young 2003: 8). The writing of female subjects as, in fact, objects in need of protection is the first way in which the discourse of *Vulnerability* produces victims.

As mentioned in Chapter 6, the link between femininity and sexual reproduction is often seen as 'natural' and childless women who deny their definitional gendered 'essence' are, therefore, rendered deviant and/or denied adult status (Hird 2003: 8). However, women's gendered bodies are also denied adult status by being constructed as belonging to the same category as children, which, for example, has been the case in language in UN documents, resolutions and peace agreements. Here, the unit of 'women-and-children' (Puechguirbal 2010; Enloe 2000) is written as vulnerable victims in need of protection. Claudia Brunner offers another example by showing how female suicide bombers are infantilised in Palestine. Brunner argues that women are being treated as equivalent to children, both having the status of victims, which means that women are removed from being seen as active political agents (Brunner 2005: 36). While male martyrs are mostly named by their full name and treated as grown-ups, even if they are only 16 years old, in the media coverage, female suicide bombers are mostly cited by their first names and treated as little girls which underlines their young age and supports an interpretation of innocence (Brunner 2005: 43). The writing of female subjects as lacking authority by being associated with children or childhood is the second way in which the discourse of *Vulnerability* influences victim stories.

## **2.2 Emotionality**

While women engage in political violence for all types of reasons [...] it is perplexing why the so-called 'personal reasons' consume much of the public's and media's fascination. (Eager 2008: 4)

In this sub-section, I address the fact that female perpetrators of political violence often are viewed as engaging in such actions due to personal connections and grievances rather than to focus on their political ambitions (Brunner 2005; Eager 2008). I argue that a discourse of *Emotionality* defines female subjects through personal relationships or individual feelings. For example, in media representations of female suicide bombers in Israel/Palestine, where the use of political martyrdom statements is common, the coverage and analysis of their behaviour often still focuses on their personal lives and feminine shortcomings such as a divorce or a miscarriage, rather than their agency in a political cause (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 120). This is particularly the case if we take into account that men too are motivated to engage in political violence and terrorism through a combination of ideological and personal motivations (Eager 2008: 4). The personal motivation aspect in representation of female agency in political violence is nothing new however. For example, in the story of the Celtic queen Boudicca who led a rebellion against the Romans around 60 AD it is mentioned that she did so after her husband had been killed and her daughters raped (Goldstein 2001: 118). A recent example is Wafa Idris, the first female Palestinian suicide bomber who killed herself in 2002. The media representation focus on that she was single, living with her mother after a compulsory divorce due to her infertility. Wafa Idris was a 'tainted woman', a 28-year-old sterile divorcee (BBC News, 30/01/2002) who seemed to fit the picture of a desperate woman, a social outlaw, who might have thought of committing suicide anyway (Brunner 2005: 32).

Another way in which the subject is written as a victim through the discourse of *Emotionality* is by emphasising the subject's maternal feelings. Caron Gentry argues that when women's

own political rationale is ignored, their agency is subordinated and their politicisation objectified. In this way, Gentry argues, a 'twisted' maternalism is used to make a woman's political decision not about strategy or politics but about emotions and relationship (Gentry 2009: 247). In addition, the discourse of *Emotionality* also constitutes the Myth of Motherhood because by demonstrating the female subject's maternal feelings, 'natural' femininity is emphasised. I use the discourse of *Emotionality* in order to show how female subjects are in fact positioned as victims with the purpose not only to deny those subjects agency, but also to rescue 'natural' femininity. In these discursive practices, emotional is defined in opposition to rational as explained in Chapter 4. As a result, by writing female agents of political violence as emotional acting out personal grievances, such subjects are associated with weakness and a lack of agency rather than being strong and rational.

### 3. VICTIM STORIES: Inversions of Motherhood

In this section, I show how female subjects positioned within various discursive practices in my empirical cases are performing the discourses of *Vulnerability* and *Emotionality*. Written as victims the female subjects are in fact positioned as objects, rather than subjects, and in need of protection, and/or associated with a lack of authority and/or described in emotional and personal terms. By being written as victims in this way, all subjects are denied agency in political violence. As victims without agency, the tension between life-giving and life-taking is removed, which in turn emphasises 'natural' femininity and the Myth of Motherhood through the subject/object's life-giving identity.

### 3.1 Performing *Vulnerability*

#### Faye

Faye Turney was written as a victim through the discourse of *Vulnerability* in three main ways: through her life-giving identity as a woman; through an emphasis on her fear and fear of rape in particular; and by being written and depicted in passive tense. First, the immediate focus on her identity as a mother with headlines such as ‘Topsy, **the mum who went to war**’ (Ingham and Flanagan, *Express*, 28/03/2007); ‘Iran **mum hostage**’ (Hughes, *Mirror*, 27/03/2007); ‘LOVING MOTHER’ (Linge, *Daily Star*, 28/03/2007); ‘The **Mother held captive** in Teheran’ (Unattributed, *Times*, 28/03/2007); ‘A **mother on parade** in Iran’s propaganda war’ (Kennedy, Webster and Sanderson, *Times*, 29/03/2007) automatically emphasised her identity as a woman. Soon, a debate whether or not mothers should be allowed to serve in the military services was intersected with discussions regarding women’s roles in the military all together: ‘Should women in the armed forces be allowed to serve on the front line?’ (Sengupta, *Independent*, 30/03/2007), ‘Frontline women: The great debate’ (Hickley, *Daily Mail*, 30/03/2007), ‘Woman at war in numbers’ (Unattributed, *Mirror*, 03/04/2007) and ‘Should women serve on the front line?’ (Unattributed, *Daily Mail*, 04/04/2007). A former Commander in the Gulf War discussed mothers in relation to men, not fathers:

I feel there is a problem with **mothers** in the frontline. Just imagine if Faye Turney had been mistreated like the Tornado pilots in the first Gulf War. There would be an eruption, and **it would not be the same if a man had been mistreated**. (Unattributed, *Daily Mail*, 06/04/2007)

Another commentary was simply titled: ‘Faye should not be in the frontline’:

The plain fact is that **women are physically vulnerable in a way men are not**. I may be old-fashioned, but I feel ashamed that Faye Turney has been put in this peril to fight on my behalf. A woman's place may no longer be in the home, but neither is it at the sharp end of an AK-47. (Heffer, *Daily Telegraph*, 31/03/2007)

Besides focusing on how women are more vulnerable than men, the debate also centred on how the inclusion of women would impact negatively both upon the armed forces but also society in general:

[A] mother's love is one of the strongest of human forces. To deny it when we recruit men and women to our armed forces is to **make our society as a whole vulnerable**. (Parkin, *Daily Mail*, 30/03/2007)

Leaving aside questions as to how any woman could voluntarily leave her young child for such tours of duty, Faye's capture highlights the real risk of women in the front line, not just to themselves but to their comrades in arms. **They put their male combatants at greater risk of harm**, not because they are weaker than them, but **because they are a far more valuable trophy of war**, a prize to be used as blackmail against her comrades and her country. (Platell, *Daily Mail*, 31/03/2007)

[W]e are the **more compassionate sex**; instinctively **more nurturing** and **lacking the thirst for aggression** that drives our male counterparts... [T]he strong **emotional ties of motherhood** cannot be underestimated. All this makes women **less effective** than the men with whom they stand on the battlefield. And the **consequences** to a fighting unit which must be tightly focused are potentially **catastrophic**. (Webb, *Daily Mail*, 07/04/2007)

Faye Turney's capture highlighted women's alleged vulnerability, but the issue of women on the frontline was most often about the impact upon male soldiers, arguments that emphasised men as active subjects and women as passive objects:

**Men put women in a 'special' category.** That is why, perhaps, when two women died under my command I found myself deeply upset. On one occasion it rendered me incapable of coherent thought for some time. (Colonel Bob Stewart quoted in Unattributed, *Daily Mail*, 06/04/2007)

When I was Chief of Defence Staff, I always thought it was a risky business because I felt they could be used as propaganda trophies and that there was a danger that **if women started getting hurt and killed it might have a greater effect on the men fighting.** (General Charles Guthrie quoted in Hickley, *Daily Mail*, 30/03/2007)

[T]he presence of women in risky situations was a distraction, because **many servicemen were still inclined to protect women and would be more distressed by the death of a woman.** Such distress can only be heightened where the woman is a mother. (Kirby, *Times*, 01/04/2007)

[J]ust how effective are women in the Armed Forces? We still don't really know the truth about how men feel alongside women in the front line. **Is there some part of them which isn't concentrating on winning and surviving but on protecting a female colleague?** These instincts go much deeper than politically-correct legislation, right into the chemistry of the body and the structure of society, and my guess is they are not so easily suppressed. (Parkin, *Daily Mail*, 30/03/2007)

The mere presence of women also has a dramatic effect on the ability of men to be combat soldiers, as has been proved in those situations



around the world where female soldiers serve on the front line. For example, **when a soldier sees a female colleague lying injured, he immediately feels his first duty must be to protect her rather than to stick to the military plan.** (Webb, *Daily Mail*, 07/04/2007)<sup>23</sup>

The arguments regarding women's impact on male soldiers are similar to arguments made in the latest Ministry of Defence report on gender in the armed forces. Here, the exclusion of women in combat roles is not motivated by differences in physical strength or levels of aggression. Instead, the exclusion is motivated with the argument that adding women could impact negatively on men and because there is not enough experience and research into this area, it is too risky to include them (MoD 2002; Woodward and Winter 2006). Not only is this argument only focused on men's behaviour but heteronormativity is also reconstructed as both male and female soldiers are thought to be heterosexual.

Initially, the Iranians made assurances that Faye Turney as the only woman received proper treatment by being held separate from the male hostages. In fact, the Iranian foreign minister suggested that Turney would be 'released as soon as possible' (Borger and Wintour, *Guardian*, 29/03/2007). In other words, what is communicated is that because Turney is a woman, she should be released before the others. However, a few days later the Iranians changed their mind and, again, Turney's female identity was highlighted:

As a result of Britain's 'wrong behaviour' the release of the **woman sailor** had been 'suspended'... A No 10 source said: 'It is cold and callous to be doing this to **a woman** at a time when she is being detained in this way.' (Borger and Wintour, *Guardian*, 30/03/2007)

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<sup>23</sup> Parkin's and Webb's commentaries in the *Daily Mail* published a week apart are very similar. Not only are the arguments echoing the discourse of *Vulnerability* similar, but they also use the same examples. For example, both articles quote (without referencing) an Israeli medical study that highlights women's physical limitations and both articles emphasise that the inclusion of women in combat roles will make our society weaker and more vulnerable as a whole.

Faye Turney's vulnerability was also directly addressed in the ITV interview: Trevor McDonald asks: '**How vulnerable did you feel?**' Faye replies: 'Initially, very vulnerable... It wasn't until like a four days into it that I started to become strong and I can and I will get through this' (ITV 2007). To illustrate Turney's vulnerability as a mother, McDonald at one point interrupts her to clarify his point: 'They actually said that to you, do you wanna see your daughter again?' McDonald then asks: 'It made you angry?' Turney replies: 'Yes.' Another way her vulnerability was portrayed was her reliance on the other male sailors and marines:

As the only woman in the group, Faye heaped praise on her fellow hostages. She said: 'I could never have got through this without them'.  
(Newton Dunn, *Sun*, 10/04/2007)

'The lads on my boat were fantastic. Every time I looked at them they were winking at me, just to like give me...' At this point, McDonald fills in the gap: 'Trying to **reassure you?**'. Faye answers 'yeah' (ITV 2007).

A second way in which Turney was powerfully written as a victim was through a focus on her fear. In both the interviews with the *Sun* and ITV, Faye Turney's fear while being held hostage was put to the fore, in particular her fear of being raped. One of the *Sun*'s cover pages (the story was divided into two parts) had 'I **feared being raped** by Iranians' as a sub-heading. Inside the paper, the article describes how 'Faye desperately tried to hide the fact she was a woman -**fearing she would be raped**':

Terrified of being discovered, she mouthed to Captain Air: '**Are they going to rape me?**' She said: 'I mouthed it to him again and again. He didn't answer but he winked and smiled at me which reassured me everything would be OK. Looking back it was unfair of me to have asked him. But I wanted to know. I wanted to be prepared for

whatever was going to happen to me.’ (Newton Dunn and Moulton, *Sun*, 09/04/2007: b)

Other headlines and stories include ‘**I was stripped and feared I’d be raped**, says Faye’ (Ballinger, *Daily Mail*, 09/04/2007) and ‘Ms Turney said that initially she had tried to cover her hair and **hide the fact that she was a woman, fearing that she could be raped**’ (Hodgson, *Guardian*, 09/04/2007).

Remarkably, even in Arthur Batchelor’s story (he was the only other hostage to sell his story although for a much smaller sum of money), Turney’s fear of being raped dominates: The front page reads: ‘Faye: **I feared they’d rape and kill me**’ and ‘Arthur: My 3 days of hell in solitary’ (Unattributed, *Daily Mirror*, 09/04/2007). Inside, the biggest headline reads ‘**Faye feared they’d rape and kill her...they called me Mr Bean**’. In the text, Batchelor is quoted saying ‘The blood drained from her face and Faye whispered **there’s going to be a rape involved in this**’ (Stansfield and Hughes, *Daily Mirror*, 09/04/2007). Not only does the representation of Turney’s fear dominate the story, but the males’ fear is marginalised. In fact, in the *Daily Mirror* article, Batchelor expresses his own fear of being raped: ‘I was absolutely exhausted by the pressure- so much I could barely move. There were times when I feared being **raped** or killed’ (Stansfield and Hughes, *Daily Mirror*, 09/04/2007). He also described an incident where another soldier’s hair was gently caressed and then sprayed with aftershave: ‘We all thought he was about to be sexually abused’ (Stansfield and Hughes, *Daily Mirror*, 09/04/2007). This article is supposedly conveying Batchelor’s story but the headlines concern Turney’s fear of being raped, whereas Batchelor’s fear is only mentioned briefly in the text. Turney’s fear of rape is emphasised and Batchelor’s fear of rape is marginalised. I argue that this is because Turney’s fear resonates better with traditional assumptions about women as

victims. In other words, the fear of rape makes more 'sense' in the story of Faye Turney than in the story of Batchelor.

Women's alleged vulnerability for rape was emphasised again in the representations of the hostages return to the UK:

The first thing I told Adam and my mum and dad was that **nobody had touched me**. I knew that would have been in their thoughts and I wanted to put their minds at rest. (Moult and Newton Dunn, *Sun*, 10/04/2007)

The focus on Turney's fear of rape only ignores that rape is used as a weapon of warfare against both men and women and that female soldiers, at least Western, are actually more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted by their fellow soldiers than by 'the enemy'.<sup>24</sup> I am not questioning whether or not Faye Turney actually feared being raped during captivity, but my argument is that the focus on her fear in the media representation, and in particular her fear of rape, positions her in the traditional role for women as victims and undermines her authority and agency as a soldier.

A third way in which Faye Turney was written as a vulnerable victim in need of protection was by being portrayed in passive tense. Visually, this was emphasised most clearly in the depiction of Turney wearing an Islamic headscarf.<sup>25</sup> On 29 March 2007, the *Independent*, the *Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Daily Mail* all have a photo of Turney wearing the headscarf on the front page. The title of the *Daily Star* is 'Mum **paraded** on telly by Iran: She's **forced** to confess and wear Muslim head-dress' (Burchell, *Daily Star*, 29/03/2007). In the *Daily Mirror*,

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<sup>24</sup> See for example Williams (2006) for an honest description of a woman's experience as a soldier in the US army, including problems regarding not only sexual assault by fellow soldiers but also stigma attached to reporting such incidents.

<sup>25</sup> In this context, the headscarf symbolises submission because Turney had to wear it, but there are also postcolonial and orientalist discourses influencing this representation. These are beyond the scope of this research project but would be excellent to explore further in future projects.

a photo of Turney in the headscarf takes up two pages accompanied with the headline ‘A sick charade’ (Hughes and Prince, *Daily Mirror*, 29/03/07). Similarly, in the *Sun*, the leading article focuses on Faye-the victim, seemingly terrified and despicably **paraded**:

Strain and fear were etched on the face of Faye Turney as she ‘confessed’ to straying into Iranian waters...By picking on the **terrified** young mum, the mullahs showed how low they are ready to sink. Parading her before TV cameras was a despicable act of aggression. (Pascoe-Watson, *Sun*, 29/03/2007)

The following day, the *Daily Mail* publishes three photos of Faye Turney on the front page. In addition to the mother/child photo and the soldier photo mentioned above there is an image from the television coverage from her capture in which Turney is veiled. The caption reads ‘mother’, ‘fighter’, ‘...**pawn**’ (Seamark, *Daily Mail*, 30/03/07).<sup>26</sup> Faye Turney now has three distinctive subject positions in these discursive practices. Moreover, the ITV interview was titled ‘A Tonight Special: **Captured, paraded** and **exploited**: the inside story of Leading Seaman Faye Turney’s ordeal’ (ITV 2007); and an article in the *Sun* had ‘STRIPPED, WARNED and THREATENED’ emphasised in bold caption and capital letters (Newton Dunn and Moulton, *Sun*, 09/04/2007: a). The representation of Turney, visually and textually, in passive tense, means that Turney is no longer the subject of the story but an object being used by men. In this story, constructed through the discourse of *Vulnerability*, the subjects are all male whilst Turney, the lone female, is a vulnerable victim; a passive object.

### Louise

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<sup>26</sup> With all the focus on Faye Turney wearing the headscarf, the *Daily Mail* was also quick to point out when she was not wearing it: ‘the only captive woman, is shown for the first time not in an Islamic hijab’. The caption says: ‘On film: Iran releases images of some hostages, apparently looking relaxed. This time, Faye Turney is not wearing the hijab’ (Seamark and Chapman, *Daily Mail*, 04/04/2007).

In *Female Agents*, Louise is bravely refusing to give up any information during torture. However, despite her bravery and heroism, the torture scenes still echo the *Vulnerability* discourse because Louise is still being rescued by her brother. When Pierre is brought to the torture chamber, Louise is sat on a chair with her arms tied behind her back in hand-cuffs. Louise, wearing her under-dress only, is visibly tortured; her legs are shivering at times.

[Heindrich:] Why have you tried to kill me twice, Louise?

Louise says nothing, looks down, whereupon she gets hit by an officer. She falls off the chair and then gets pulled back upon it. Heindrich sits down in front of Pierre. At this point, the camera angle is from behind Pierre, depicting Louise and an officer in the background behind Heindrich, indicating that this story is told from Pierre's perspective. Pierre is the main character in this scene. Heindrich keeps asking Pierre the same questions, hoping that when he watches his sister being tortured, Pierre will finally give in and give up the information. Pierre, however, refuses to give in. We watch Louise's head being held under water. Pierre still does not speak.

[Heindrich:] I thought a brother and a sister's love was the strongest.  
(Louise is still being held under water). I wish I had a sister like Louise. I would hate to have a brother like you.

These torture scenes are overlapping with scenes in which Gaelle, who is held in a cell in the same building, is preparing to take her life. As such, the two different scenes communicate boundaries between life and death, as well as power over life. As Gaelle is taking off her clothes, her cell is very bright and a church choir can be heard in the background. The powerful music continues in the following scene when we are back in the torture chamber. Pierre is in a stress position with his hands tied in hand cuffs attached to the ceiling. Louise is

being hit in the stomach by two officers in the background. The music interlinks the two scenes powerfully as Gaelle is taking her own life and Pierre's reflecting over whether or not to save his sister (who never asks him to do so).

[Heindrich:] She can't take much more. You can still **save her**. (The same sacral music is still playing).

[Pierre:] If I talk, do I have your word she will live?

[Heindrich:] I give you my word.

[Pierre:] I want your word as an officer.

[Heindrich:] Stop! (the torturing).

As he finally gives in, Pierre starts sobbing.

[Heindrich:] I'll keep my promise. Your sister's life will be spared.

Pierre looks at Louise, she moves her lip slightly in a covered smile of gratitude, she seems thankful. What is communicated in these torture scenes is that although Louise is very brave and strong, able to endure torture without giving in, in the end, she is still saved by her brother. Pierre's heroic act of protecting his sister has overshadowed Louise's heroism. This is how, despite Louise's bravery and heroism, it is Pierre, the male subject, who through the discourse of *Vulnerability* is protecting Louise, the passive victim in need of protection. The focus in this scene, moreover, is on the 'dialogue' between Pierre and Heindrich. They are the subjects (male) whereas Louise (female) is a silent and passive object in the background.

The choir-like sacral music continues in the next scene where Gaelle naked lies down on the floor. She tells a prayer and swallows a cyanide pill. The music intensifies and the camera shots from the ceiling show Gaelle as Jesus on the cross, arms out to the sides. The religious

references are very strong, both visually and through the music. A power over life is communicated in the collage of images moving from Pierre and Louise's situation in the torture chamber and Gaelle's in her cell. In the torture chamber, Pierre has power over Louise's life and by taking her own life, Gaelle is retaking control over her own.

Similarly to how Faye Turney is represented, Louise is also portrayed as passive. For example, at two different occasions, Louise's life is saved by the other agents. She also misses her shot at Heindrich at the train station and is captured. She is tortured before she is saved by Pierre and then rescued by Jeanne, twice. In these scenes, Louise is acted upon rather than having agency in the story. She is represented as an object rather than a subject. This is how Louise is written as a victim through the discourse of *Vulnerability*.

### Lynndie

As mentioned above, women's gendered bodies are also denied adult status by being associated with children. This is how Lynndie England was written as a victim, especially by her own defence team during the trials. A psychologist who examined England as a child was called to give evidence and portrayed her as a '**blue baby**' deprived of oxygen, and suffering from a malformation of her tongue that required it to be clipped. The psychologist also found her suffering 'from an inability to process information, an ailment affecting fewer than **2 children** in 100' (Blumenthal, *New York Times*, 04/05/2005). The defence team's argument was that she in this way was a victim who could not tell right from wrong and was only doing as she was told:



‘The entire case, what this has always been about, is authority,’ Captain Crisp said. ‘Pfc. England’s **blind compliance toward authority** and her **lack of authority** in any context.’ (Cloud, *New York Times*, 27/09/2005)

Her lawyer Capt Jonathan Crisp said: Her role in this is not what it was initially thought to be. **She was a pawn.** (Unattributed, *Daily Mirror*, 30/04/2005)

Lynndie England’s insinuated low level of intelligence was also echoed by the judge:

Then he [Judge Colonel Pohl] turned to Private England. ‘Maybe you think we forgot about you,’ he said, trying to explain the ruling to her but realizing, he said, ‘**I’m not sure you’ll understand.**’ (Blumenthal, *New York Times*, 05/05/2005)

In one of her first interviews, Lynndie England said that she was only following orders. In the *Daily Star* this story got the title ‘Lynndie **told to pose**’ (Unattributed, *Daily Star*, 13/05/2004). Again, the title suggests passivity rather than agency and England is written as an object in a story where Graner is the subject and main character:

‘Did you think any of this was wrong?’ the judge asked. ‘Why were you doing it?’ **He asked me to**, she said, referring to Specialist Graner. (Levy, *New York Times*, 03/05/2005)

Standing **just over five feet tall** and speaking almost inaudibly, with little emotion, Private England testified in court at Fort Hood that she went along with the demands of a fellow soldier, Specialist Charles A. Graner Jr., thinking ‘it was just for his personal amusement.’ (Levy, *New York Times*, 03/05/2005)

I argue that the focus on her height, her insinuated low level of intelligence and the alleged lack of authority associates Lynndie England with childhood and writes her as a passive

victim who is denied adulthood. This is how the discourse of *Vulnerability* influences the writing of England as an object denied of agency in political violence and this is how victim stories are told as inversions of motherhood.

### Janis

In the independent panel's report (the Schlesinger report) about the Abu Ghraib scandal, published in the *New York Times*, Karpinski was portrayed as an incompetent leader in need of mentoring:

We believe Lt. Gen. [Ricardo] Sanchez should have taken stronger action in November when he realized the extent of the leadership problems at Abu Ghraib. His **attempt to mentor** Brig. Gen. [Janis] Karpinski, though well-intended, was insufficient in a combat zone in the midst of a serious and growing insurgency. (Unattributed, *New York Times*, 25/08/2004)

According to Karpinski, her leadership abilities were never in doubt:

Gen. Sanchez never once - not once did he ever mention to me his concerns about my leadership ability. He never mentored me, he never suggested that I try something differently, he never criticized me, not once. (Karpinski, *Signal City*, 04/07/2004)

The *Washington Post* quoted an unclassified report by an Air Force psychiatrist who studied 'physical abuses by US military police of Iraqi prison detainees':

Nelson said Karpinski had difficulty delegating work, dismissed punishments of lesser officers that were recommended by her staff, and was ineffective in resolving problems with personnel, logistics,

administration and supplies, of which she was aware. Karpinski ‘**felt herself a victim** and she propagated a negativity that permeated throughout’ the area of her command responsibility, Nelson wrote. (Smith, *Washington Post*, 24/05/2004)

Furthermore, after Karpinski left the Army, she was described as an abandoned child. An article published in the *Times* was titled ‘My army life: **lonely**, restless and **afraid**’. The author suggests that she is lonely and ‘now that she has lost the crutch of the Army, feels somewhat **abandoned**.’ The article says: ‘She lives alone in South Carolina and **never had children**.’ Karpinski is quoted saying: ‘If anybody wanted kids more than the other, George did. Not that I didn’t want them. It just wasn’t on the cards. And you have to be together occasionally’ (de Bertodano, *Times*, 13/08/2004). Here, Karpinski is written as a victim, both according to her own supposed feelings and by being associated with childhood. In addition, her choice of not having children is turned into a punishment as she is assumed to be lonely when she has left/being kicked out of the ‘family’ of the army. I argue that by representing Karpinski as in need of mentoring and as a victim herself, she is associated with childhood and a lack of authority. As a result, she is denied agency in these discursive practices. This is how Janis Karpinski is written as a victim through the discourse of *Vulnerability* and why victim stories denying female agency in political violence are inversions of motherhood.

### 3.2 Performing *Emotionality*

#### Faye

When the ITV interview begins, Faye Turney is already tearful. As the interview continues, it becomes clear that the focus is on Turney as an emotional, weak and vulnerable mother, not a

brave soldier. We (the audience) are watching Turney as she is watching the television footage of herself during captivity for the first time. We see her face in profile with Trevor MacDonald sitting next to her in the background. As she watches the pictures of herself, Turney is biting her lip, seemingly trying not to cry. She gets tears in her eyes. She is emotional. At this point, McDonald asks: '**How do you feel** Faye, seeing that back now?' Turney answers it upsets her deeply. The next question from McDonald is '**What were your emotions** on being separated from the rest of your colleagues?' Turney replies it was horrible and that she had a panic attack since being put in her cell (ITV 2007). When Faye Turney describes the moment her Iranian captors told her that her colleagues had been sent home and that she was the only one left, she says: 'It was just [Turney sighs]...what a feeling'. She seems to get emotional and the camera zooms in. She swallows. McDonald asks 'So you felt you were in this alone?' Here, the close-up on Turney's face emphasises her emotionality. Then, McDonald asks another bizarre question: 'Did you ever **cry yourself to sleep**?' Again, Turney gets emotional as she answers in the affirmative. As mentioned above, of all shots, a close-up is 'the most concrete, most objective through what it shows, the most abstract, most subjective through what it signifies' (Mitry 2000: 67, 68). Thus, it is Turney's emotionality that is in focus here and the reason for this, I argue, is because emotionality, due to the Myth of Motherhood, is the expected and 'normal' response for a woman. In this sense, emotionality is part of 'natural' femininity. At the same time, however, within the masculinised context of the military, emotionality is also associated with weakness.

The moment Turney was told she was the only one left was also used by the newspapers as when she 'totally lost it':

All I could think of was how completely alone I was... At that moment I just **totally lost it**. All I could think of was what my family must be

going through. What would my husband Adam be telling Molly? Did they even know I was missing? I **cried my eyes out**. I asked the guards about my friends but all they did was laugh at me. (Newton Dunn and Moulton, *Sun*, 09/04/2007: a)

Even though this quote concerns her feelings about being alone, commentaries focused on her role as a mother:

Faye Turney goes on to say that, once in Iranian custody, she '**totally lost it**' when she thought about what her three-year-old daughter Molly would be going through. '**I cried my eyes out**,' she told the *Sun*, 'but all the guards did was laugh at me.' It is hardly surprising that her interrogators then began to ask her whether she wanted to see her daughter again. (Lawson, *Independent*, 10/04/2007)

Here, the focus is on a mother's feelings. Crying her eyes out is linked to her role as a mother as she is portrayed as having lost it when thinking about her daughter when, in fact, she was expressing her feelings about being 'completely alone'. I argue that the links were made with reference to her motherhood because this 'makes sense' according to the Myth of Motherhood. In other words, by emphasising Turney's identity as a mother, she is 'naturally' written as emotional. Moreover, speaking of the moment when she had to reveal that she was female, Faye Turney's emotional experience is described:

**I had tears welling in my eyes** because I knew this was the point they would discover I was female. But I was determined not to give them the satisfaction of seeing me cry and I pulled myself together. There was a look of total disbelief and they kept staring at me and repeating 'woman, woman'. (Newton Dunn and Moulton, *Sun*, 09/04/2007: b)

Similarly, much of the media coverage of the hostages' reunions with friends and families focused on Turney's emotional reunion with her husband but above all with her daughter. The

*Sun*'s headline on the front page is '**Hello Molly!**' In the text we learn that 'Hostage Faye Turney was reunited with little daughter Molly yesterday - amid **tearful scenes**' (Newton Dunn and Moulton, *Sun*, 06/04/2007). Later, in the *Sun*'s second day coverage of 'Faye Turney's ordeal' based on the interview with Turney, the front page reads '**Mummy mummy!**' and a photo of Turney lifting up her daughter Molly is covering the whole page. The caption reads '**Tears** as Faye holds her little Molly again. FREED Navy hostage Faye Turney lovingly kisses the little daughter she feared she might never see again. Faye, 25, told last night how she **wept** at being greeted by cries of '**Mummy, Mummy**' at an emotional reunion with Molly, three' (Moulton and Newton Dunn, *Sun*, 10/04/2007: a, b). Inside the paper, it is mentioned that 'throughout her time as a prisoner of the fanatical Iranian regime, the thought of her only child growing up without a mother had reduced her to **tears**' (Newton Dunn and Moulton, *Sun*, 10/04/2007: b). Another article was titled: 'Smiles that say Mummy is home: **Tears** and laughter in the sunshine at hostages' reunion'. In the text it is mentioned that 'some chatted with their families, while others were overcome with the emotion and **broke down and wept**' (Kelly, *Daily Mail*, 06/04/2007). However, the story does not tell us who broke down and wept. Considering the attention to Turney's emotionality in the overall coverage, I speculate that if it was Turney who was 'overcome with emotion and broke down and wept' she would have been named. Therefore, I argue that in this victim story men's emotionality is anonymous, whereas Turney's emotionality is identified and highly visible.

I do not suggest that Faye Turney should not have been emotional but I argue that the portrayal of her is based on 'emotionality' as the appropriate response for a woman with her experience. The interviews are set up to portray her emotionality and by doing so the representation of Turney follows essentialist assumptions of gender behaviour. In other words, by portraying Turney as emotional, she is performing 'natural' femininity. Turney is

cast in the traditional role for women in war, that of a victim, whereas her authority and agency as a soldier is forgotten. If the interviewee was a male both the questions and the set up would have been different. Also, if Turney had been showed the footage of herself in captivity beforehand, the desired outcome of her emotionality might not have happened.

### Nasima

Nasima is written as a victim through the discourse of *Emotionality* in two main ways: by being motivated by personal relationships and by the insertion of doubts and maternal insights. First, by describing her motivations as personal, Nasima is portrayed as acting out of desperation. In the beginning of *Britz*, Nasima is acting out her dissatisfaction with the situation for British Muslims in non-violent ways. She takes part in demonstrations and she voices concerns about the radicalisation of British Muslims and the resort to violence as a means for change. Nasima is convinced political issues should be solved through democratic means. At the end, however, Nasima has become radicalised and transformed into a suicide bomber. In particular, Nasima's radicalisation takes place as a response to two failed personal relationships: her relationship with Sabia, her best friend, and Jude, her secret boyfriend. Sabia, whose brother is under surveillance by counter-terrorism agencies, is being incarcerated for buying a larger amount of spices. In prison, she is humiliated and later tells Nasima she was 'touched'. Once released, Sabia is put under a control order and not allowed to see her friends or leave the house. Due to the trauma, Sabia eventually commits suicide. The second failed personal relationship is with Jude, one of her fellow medical students. Nasima is afraid her family will not accept Jude as her boyfriend because he is black and so

their relationship is secret. Nasima's father finds out, however, and sends her off to Pakistan to meet and plan a marriage to a local man.

Jude finds Nasima in Pakistan, but members of Nasima's 'new family' attack him. Nasima flees, assuming Jude has been killed. Nasima now finds herself in a desperate situation as she has run away from the family she was supposed to marry into, her father thinks she has put shame upon their family because she has had a (sexual) relationship with a man without being married, she believes her boyfriend has been killed and her best friend has committed suicide. Nasima had made arrangements to train as a fighter in Pakistan before leaving the UK and, subsequently, meets up with a woman in a cafe. Although the meeting was arranged before Jude showed up, the latest trauma for Nasima seems to function as another push towards violent resolutions and no turning back. In addition, when training is over and Nasima needs to make up her mind about the suicide mission, the camp organisers reveal that they have faked her death. Nasima is shown a photo of her family attending her funeral. In effect, Nasima now has no choice. She cannot go back to her old life in Britain anymore. She has got nothing to lose.

Nasima's personal motivation for her actions is also demonstrated when the man who is helping her prepare for her mission says 'You'll sit at God's right hand'. Nasima replies: 'That's not why I'm doing it'. Instead, Nasima is taking revenge for her friend but she is also acting out of despair as she has no choice. Although Nasima's martyrdom statement issuing her political reasons is shown in the epilogue, I argue that Nasima is written as desperate, as a victim having no other choice than to choose the path of violence due to the failed personal relationships. This representation is ordered by the discourse of *Emotionality* because by representing Nasima as motivated by personal rather than political reasons, her agency is



denied and she is but a victim. As demonstrated above, women are associated with emotionality rather than rationality in traditional ideas about gender and political violence. Thus, it 'makes sense' that a female perpetrator of violence is driven by personal motivations.

Second, another way it is shown that killing is 'unnatural' for a female subject is through the insertion of doubts and maternal insights. In *Britz*, Nasima is expressing concerns about the target of her attack. When she finds out about the location she asks: 'who will be there?' The man helping her with her final preparations says it is bankers on a lunch-break with their families. Nasima looks up, seems troubled and says: 'I didn't realise there would be children there'. At this point, a simple melody which will run until Nasima reaches her target starts to play. Background music is usually used in order to establish a specific mood or emotion. In these scenes, the music is played in minor keys giving a sparse, bleak and serious impression which functions to enrich the emotional communication of the scenes.

Nasima's hesitation about hurting children is an example of how the tension between life-giving (Myth of Motherhood) and life-taking (agency in political violence) materialises. By showing her hesitation through maternal feelings, the audience is reminded that her [a woman's] proper role is to give life, not to take it. Thus, by portraying the female subject as having maternal insights or in doubt, essentialist ideas about gender, agency and political violence are reinforced and female agency in political violence is, subsequently, rendered 'unnatural'. Moreover, the hesitation about the use of force in gendered terms in itself writes the subject as, not only emotional rather than rational, but as weak. In *Britz*, Nasima hesitates about the use of violence right until the end of the programme. For example, at a meeting with the camp organisers in Pakistan, Nasima says she has only agreed to training in the camp, not yet about 'the other', meaning the suicide mission. This reminds the audience that she is still

hesitating about acts of violence. Moreover, shortly before Nasima leaves the house in London where she has been staying for her final mission, she phones her brother Sohail's mobile phone, but he does not answer it. Again, this shows that Nasima hesitates about the mission. In these subject positions, Nasima is not a strong masculinised subject who can 'do-it-as-a-man' and 'naturally' use violence. Instead, Nasima is femininised through notions of care and emotionality. This is how Nasima is written as a victim through the discourse of *Emotionality*.

### Lynndie

In Errol Morris' documentary *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008) England defends her actions at Abu Ghraib prison by saying 'it was all because of a man'. This was also a common thread in the media representation during the trials:

I was embarrassed because I was used by Private Graner; I didn't realise it at the time... I **trusted** him and I **loved** him. (Unattributed, *Times*, 28/09/2005)

England's defence countered that England was only trying to please her soldier boyfriend, then-Cpl. Charles Graner Jr., labelled the abuse ringleader by prosecutors: 'She was **a follower**, she was an individual who was **smitten** with Graner,' Crisp said. 'She just did whatever he wanted her to do'. (Gutierrez, *USA Today*, 26/09/2005)

[S]he was **under the influence of Charles Graner**, an enlisted man who was her boyfriend and who oversaw an Abu Ghraib cellblock... 'Those pictures don't show the absolute amazing trust she placed in him **because she loved him**.' (Cloud, *New York Times*, 22/09/2005)

[S]he is, as she says, weak and passive and the sort of woman who is an **easy mark for a man with the gift of fibbery**. This was Charles A. Graner Jr., her superior and boyfriend, father of her child, and stock character in every country-western song: He left her and the baby for another woman. As is very often the case in life and literature ... the perpetrator is often also a victim. No reading of England's life story can stand any other interpretation. She is one of life's losers. (Cohen, *Washington Post*, 01/10/2005)

By emphasising England's emotionality, the defence team tried to put focus on England's identity as a woman and highlight that it is 'unnatural' for a woman to participate in such activities. By associating her behaviour with emotionality, however, England is also associated with a lack of authority. This was probably the defence team's desired outcome, however, this was also the predominant representation of England in the media at the time of her trials. By being portrayed as a victim of her own emotions and lacking authority, attempts are made to re-write England as 'just a woman' who could not help herself but was blinded by love. This is how Lynndie England is denied agency and written as a victim through the discourse of *Emotionality*.

### Janis

As mentioned above, Janis Karpinski was considered 'extremely emotional' by General Taguba in the investigation of the 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police brigade:

BG Karpinski was **extremely emotional** during much of her testimony. What I found particularly disturbing in her testimony was her complete unwillingness to either understand or accept that many of the problems inherent in the 800th MP Brigade were caused or

exacerbated by poor leadership and the refusal of her command to both establish and enforce basic standards and principles among its soldiers. (Taguba 2004)

Karpinski defended being emotional by arguing that she is a caring boss who indeed will get emotional when defending her soldiers. However, Karpinski also claims that she was not the only person involved being emotional:

But it wasn't me who was overwhelmed. Every man in that room - and there were six of them - was in tears when my statement was finished. Every one of them. Including Taguba. And I think that they were embarrassed by that, and that's why he made that comment in the report. (Karpinski, *Signal City*, 04/07/2004)

In contrast, I argue that Karpinski was described as 'extremely emotional' in order to undermine her authority and agency and in that sense blame her for the Abu Ghraib scandal. By using Karpinski's emotionality, her identity as a woman is highlighted and her identity as a military officer is forgotten. In the end, Karpinski was officially punished for a false shop-lifting charge from 2002, before she was even a General, not for the torture scandal (Unattributed, CBS News, 02/06/04). Still, I argue that by emphasising Karpinski's emotionality, she was not only read as a woman, but this gendering was absolutely vital in order to construct her as a weak leader.

Karpinski was portrayed as not being in control of her soldiers and as a naïve leader unable to understand the implications of her leadership: 'MP Commander: "No knowledge" of alleged abuse' (CNN, 04/05/2004). The same day, the *Sun* headlined an article 'JAIL BOSS IN DENIAL' (Unattributed, *Sun*, 04/05/2004). A few days earlier, the *Daily Mail* published an article titled 'They love it here said General Janis' (Unattributed, *Daily Mail*, 30/04/04). Not only does this article imply that Karpinski has no idea about what is actually happening at

Abu Ghraib and is, therefore, lacking control and authority, but it also refers to Karpinski by using her first name only. As mentioned above in relation to female suicide bombers in Palestine, the representation of a first name only indicates that the subject lacks authority. This is repeated in the text of the article where ‘colleagues’, who are anonymous, critique ‘Janis’:

**Colleagues** of the tough, super-fit officer last night described her as a woman with one mission to raise her own profile. One colleague said: ‘**Janis** sees herself as making way for women to get to the top in the US Army. But many of her soldiers said she had been promoted beyond her ability because she was a woman.’ (Churcher and Graham, *Mail on Sunday*, 02/05/2004)

Approximately a year after the images were released and Karpinski had been framed as a weak leader, she received her penalty. Her rank was reduced to colonel and she was issued a reprimand and relieved of her command. However, she was not officially punished for what happened at Abu Ghraib:

The Army said Karpinski was guilty of dereliction of duty and shoplifting. Investigators did not substantiate allegations that she made a false statement to an investigating team and failed to obey a lawful order. Karpinski was relieved of command of the 800th Military Police Brigade on April 8. President Bush had to approve the Pentagon’s action against Karpinski. (Moniz, *USA Today*, 06/05/2005)

‘Though Brig. Gen. Karpinski’s performance of duty was found to be seriously lacking, the investigation determined that no action or lack of action on her part contributed specifically to the abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib,’ according to an Army news release. (White, *Washington Post*, 06/05/2005)

Despite having been officially cleared from the abuse at Abu Ghraib, Karpinski is commonly referred to as the highest ranking officer to have been punished for the scandal. She also remains the only General ever to have been demoted in the US army (Karpinski, *Signal City*, 13/11/2005). I argue that Karpinski was framed as a bad and weak leader through the discourse of *Emotionality*. Karpinski was weak in the sense that she ‘felt like a victim’ herself and by being represented as a naïve leader not in control of her soldiers. By emphasising Karpinski’s female identity through the discourse of *Emotionality*, I argue, Karpinski was not only constructed as a victim denied of agency but as an ‘unnatural’ leader. In this sense, Karpinski’s female, life-giving, identity was crucial for the construction of her as a bad and incompetent military leader.

### Ulrike

Ulrike Meinhof is written as a victim through the discourse of *Emotionality* in three main ways: by the insertion of maternal insights, by acting out of desperation, and by being the femininised subject defined through motherhood. First, similarly to how Nasima’s hesitation about killing children is portrayed in *Britz*, Ulrike Meinhof’s initial hesitations about the use of force is also demonstrated by the insertion of maternal insights. In her role as a journalist, Ulrike has arranged a meeting with Andreas Baader, who is serving time in prison, in order to interview him for a book. The meeting is taking place outside of prison under the surveillance of two armed guards. In reality, Ulrike is meeting Baader in order to help him escape. Aware that armed members of the RAF will arrive to free Baader, Ulrike asks a policeman:

[Ulrike:] Are you married? Do you have children?

[Policeman:] Yes, wife and children.

[Ulrike:] Oh.

The tone in her voice seems disappointed. Ulrike is expressing doubt over the possibility of making a child fatherless. Aware of the risk that the officer might get injured or killed, Ulrike's hesitation about violence is communicated through maternal feelings with connotations to nurturing, caring, affection and attachment. I argue that Ulrike's maternal feelings are used to communicate that the use of force is 'unnatural' for Ulrike but also to emphasise her position at the crossroads between violence and non-violence and to illuminate the boundary between appropriate and inappropriate femininity. By depicting Ulrike as showing maternal feelings, her role as a woman and a mother is emphasised which enables the writing of her as the feminised subject for whom participation in violence is 'unnatural'. This is how Ulrike signifies 'natural' femininity and the Myth of Motherhood is communicated.

Second, Ulrike's actions and choices are explained through her personal relationships. The film starts with Ulrike, her two children and husband on a beach in northern Germany, which immediately puts focus on Ulrike's role as a mother. Soon, there is a scene where Ulrike leaves her home with a bag and her daughters. Bleak slow music (violin chords) starts to play communicating seriousness and sadness. The next scene shows when Ulrike moments earlier had walked in on her husband having sex with another woman and the audience understands that this is the reason Ulrike has left her husband. Furthermore, because of this personal trauma, Ulrike seems to be searching for a new meaningful purpose in life. She is portrayed as being influenced and inspired by Gudrun Ensslin's actions. When Ulrike, in her role as a journalist, is covering Ensslin and Baader's trials, she listens in on an interview with Ensslin's parents:

[Journalist:] How has your relationship to your daughter changed with this act?

[Father:] It was surprising for me to see how Gudrun, who was always very rational, reached a state of almost euphoric self-realization through this act. A holy self-realization.

[Mother:] I sense that she has achieved something liberating, even in the family. Suddenly, I myself feel liberated from a constriction and the fear that previously dominated my life. She released me from my fears.

After this scene, the music intensifies and gets more energetic. At the same time, we see Ulrike writing an article about resistance for a political journal. Ulrike has clearly been inspired by what Gudrun's parents were saying. She decides to arrange a meeting with Gudrun.

Ulrike's personal motivations to join the Red Army Faction (RAF) are also highlighted when she decides to take an active part in the freeing of Andreas Baader, mentioned above. Gudrun says to Ulrike: 'Just write about it afterwards. That's all you're good for anyway'. As mentioned in Chapter 6, the character Peter functions to signify Ulrike at the crossroads between violence and non-violence. When Peter voices concerns regarding Ulrike's decision to help Baader escape ('This is crazy!'), Ulrike says: 'I have to do it'. In other words, Ulrike feels she has to take part for personal reasons. Another personal relationship which seems to make Ulrike 'turn to violence' is her relationship with Rudi Dutschke, a union leader. We see Ulrike attend a meeting where Rudi Dutschke is speaking. He recognises that she is there and gives her a smile. This suggests that Ulrike and Dutschke are close friends. Soon afterwards Dutschke is shot by a right-wing extremist. He survives, but is brain-damaged. When Ulrike hears about the shooting on the radio she starts to cry. This seems to be yet another personal



trauma for Ulrike. In combination, what is communicated is that Ulrike ends up as a female perpetrator of political violence due to personal traumas and failures.

The third way in which Ulrike Meinhof is written as a victim through the discourse of *Emotionality* is by being portrayed as the feminine subject in contrast to Gudrun Ensslin. This was mentioned in Chapter 5 when I explained how Gudrun is written as a masculinised subject. As the feminine subject, Ulrike is signifying emotionality, passivity and non-violence. In their first meeting, Ulrike's non-violent method for political change is critiqued by Gudrun:

[Gudrun:] If they shoot our people like Ohnesorg and Dutschke then we are going to **shoot back**. That is the logical consequence.

[Ulrike:] You are not serious?

[Gudrun:] All over the world armed comrades are fighting. We must show our solidarity.

[Ulrike:] But we do.

[Gudrun:] Even if the Fascists throw you in jail? Such sacrifices have to be made. Or do you think that your theoretical masturbation will change anything?

When Gudrun tells Ulrike that her theoretical masturbation is not working, she is critiquing Ulrike for passivity, not real action. This is one way in which Gudrun is written as the active masculinised subject, whereas Ulrike is the passive feminine subject. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the two women, one feminine and one masculine subject, are juxtaposed visually through clothes and make-up, but they are also portrayed very differently when they are arrested. When Gudrun is arrested for carrying a gun in a clothes shop she violently tries to resist and the music in the background is fast and energetic, similar to music in an action

movie. When Ulrike is arrested, however, she collapses and starts crying. She makes no attempt to resist while slow and sad background music starts to play. Overall, Ulrike is shown crying several times, whereas Gudrun is not. As the film continues, the division between the two women increases and results in confrontation when, in prison, Gudrun starts to write the group's statements instead of Ulrike:

[Ulrike:] Why are you changing my texts?

[Gudrun:] Because the stuff you write is depressing.

[Ulrike:] I don't understand why you are doing this. You swoop on every mistake I make! I can't take it! Your deceit drives me up the wall!

[Gudrun:] You wait! I'm so sick of your bouts of exhaustion! I'm so fed up with them! You want me to snap!

In the following scene, the two women are yet again arguing. In the next scene, Andreas is reading a letter from Gudrun:

[Gudrun:] You want to know about Ulrike? It's sinister. A vampire, trembling with bloodlust. Ulrike's two laughs during work were necrophilic, hysterical, absolutely ugly and clearly directed against me... Although I still say it's directed less against me than against you.

When Ulrike shows the group a new statement she has written, Andreas reads it, says 'it's crap' and tears it apart. Gudrun is sitting with her back turned towards Ulrike.

[Ulrike:] You are giving me false information or Gudrun completely rewrites my stuff. Why do you do that? (She asks Gudrun.) To torment me?

Still with her back facing Ulrike, Gudrun says:

[Gudrun:] To pay back your tormenting. (Gudrun turns her head, looks Ulrike in the eyes.) An eye for an eye.

[Ulrike:] I don't get it, or I don't want to. But I can't take it anymore.

[Gudrun:] **I'm no witch, but I've learned to be brutal.**

After one of the trial sessions, Gudrun whispers to Ulrike:

[Gudrun:] You are the knife in the RAF's back.

Ulrike never goes back to the trials, she takes her own life. In this sense, the tension within the RAF, in particular between Gudrun and Ulrike, pushes Ulrike towards mental ill-health and suicide. By portraying the tension between Ulrike and Gudrun as one between femininity and masculinity, the film reinforces traditional ideas about gender, agency and political violence where masculinity is associated with power, rationality, agency, violence, strong etc. and femininity is associated with emotionality, passivity, weakness and non-violence.

Moreover, in order to emphasise Ulrike as the feminine subject, her story is told through her motherhood, whereas Gudrun's motherhood is but a footnote. The following conversation between Ulrike and Gudrun takes place in the beginning of the film:

[Ulrike:] What about your son?

[Gudrun:] If you are serious, you have to be able to **make** such **sacrifices**. Andreas has a little girl as well.

[Ulrike:] I could **never leave my children**

This scene communicates first of all that the difference between these women is placed within their roles as mothers. Gudrun has sacrificed her motherhood in order to pursue her political aims and in order to function as a perpetrator of political violence. Ulrike, however, says she

could never make such a sacrifice. Here, Ulrike is acting within 'natural' femininity and along the Myth of Motherhood. The scene also emphasises the film's central focus on motherhood rather than fatherhood. In the film, we see both Gudrun's son and Ulrike's two daughters, whereas Andreas' daughter is only mentioned once and never shown. In this sense, the two women's motherhood is visible whereas Andreas Baader's fatherhood is invisible.

Furthermore, as the film progresses Ulrike's identity as a suitable mother is compromised. When some of the most prominent RAF members travel to Jordan for guerrilla training, Ulrike's children are being looked after by other members in Sicily. In Jordan, there is a meeting between Andreas, Gudrun, Ulrike and the camp organisers regarding Ulrike's children:

[Gudrun:] We have a problem with Ulrike's kids. They are in Sicily now but they cannot stay there any longer. Is it possible to send them to Jordan to one of these camps for Palestinian orphans?

[Man:] Generally speaking yes, but if we accept them, she will never see them again.

Gudrun answers the man yes. During the discussion, Ulrike remains quiet and passively looks down. She seems shocked by what has been arranged, yet, she does not protest. These scenes, I argue, shows not only Ulrike's passivity towards Gudrun and Andreas but it also constructs her as a bad mother unable to protect her children. She seems to accept the decision for her children to be sent away to become resistance fighters. Ulrike, who in the beginning of the film had said that she could never leave her children, has now completed the transformation into a potential monster who is capable of abandoning their children. Crucially, however, here, the abandoning of the children does not write Ulrike as a monster but as a victim. In the book which the film is based on (Aust 2008), it is mentioned how Ulrike in 1973 stops

allowing her children to come and visit her in prison. She never saw her children again (Aust 2008: 200). This information is not, however, included in the film. I argue that such exclusion enables Ulrike to be written as a victim rather than a monster. Rather than being a monster, who actively sacrifices her children, Ulrike represents failed motherhood, and the reason she fails is because she is the weak, passive and emotional feminine subject. Her mental ill health and subsequent suicide enriches this representation.

### Gaelle

In the beginning of *Female Agents*, Gaelle is most often positioned as a strong and committed agent influenced by the discourse of the *Vacant Womb*. However, as soon as she gets captured, Gaelle is instead positioned as the ultimate weak female subject. Heindrich and his men bring Gaelle into the room where Pierre is being tortured. Gaelle is stripped off her clothes until she is standing in her underwear only. She is crying quietly. Heindrich asks Pierre:

[Heindrich:] Where are your accomplices hiding? And the Phoenixes?  
What are they for?

While Pierre says nothing, Gaelle wets herself. At this moment, there is an extreme close-up on her underwear which takes up the whole screen. As mentioned above, close-ups are used to emphasise the object's qualities:

The object presented in close-up inevitably draws attention to its perceptible qualities, to everything which makes it different. It appeals to the emotions but these can only be felt, experienced by seeing it.  
(Mitry 2000: 67)

Thus, by showing her underwear in a close-up as she wets herself, an emphasis on Gaelle's fear, weakness and vulnerability is communicated. The Germans put Gaelle on a chair and pulls out her finger nail. Gaelle screams very loudly. There is a close-up on her face as she immediately gives up information regarding where the female agents were meeting up:

[Gaelle:] The Duroc Institute for the Blind. (Gaelle is crying). We were to meet there to await orders for a new mission.

The next scene focuses on Pierre's face as he looks down visibly disappointed. Later, when the two prisoners are chained to the walls of the same room, Pierre asks Gaelle about her cyanide pill. There is a close-up on Gaelle's face as she turns away and says:

[Gaelle:] I am scared. You don't know what that means.

When Heindrich enters the room, he offers Gaelle a white tissue but she refuses. The camera is filming from Gaelle's perspective. Heindrich crouches to be levelled with Gaelle and the camera.

[Heindrich:] I am going to need your services again. Your friends got away from me. Where and when was the back-up?

[Gaelle:] The back-up?

[Heindrich:] Don't act dumb. I know the SOE methods.

[Gaelle:] Louise knows that I betrayed them. She won't come to the rendezvous. (Gaelle defiantly looks Heindrich in the eyes).

[Heindrich:] She is a woman who likes to take risks.

[Gaelle:] If I talk, what is in it for me?

[Heindrich:] Your freedom.

[Gaelle:] To be tried and sentenced by the SOE?

[Heindrich:] You prefer that we torture you? (Gaelle looks down, her nose starts to bleed.)

[Gaelle:] Tomorrow noon. Concorde Metro, Pont de Neilly platform.

The agents had been told that, in the event of a capture, they must endure at least 48 hours of captivity, even if they are being tortured, before they can reveal any secret information in order for the other agents to get to safety. Gaelle, however, gives up the information almost immediately. Despite the earlier writing of Gaelle as a heroine (when she was mainly positioned against other females), in these discursive practices Gaelle is positioned against males and written as the ultimate female victim. Gaelle is weak, demonstrated by the fact that she immediately gives in and that she is bleeding from her nose, she is scared as the focus on her fear signifies, and she is emotional because she is crying.

### Suzy

In *Female Agents*, Suzy is the only one of the agents who has no previous military training. Instead, she was chosen for the mission because she had had a relationship with Heindrich. When Louise and the other agents have been captured or killed, Suzy is Buckmaster's last chance to assassinate Heindrich. The plan is for Suzy to meet, seduce and subsequently kill him, her former lover.

[Heindrich:] Liliane, (Suzy's real name)... for three years I refused to believe you were dead. Why did you leave? (Suzy turns around, faces him.)

[Suzy:] Our love was doomed.

[Heindrich:] Give us another chance. Come with me. I am leaving for Germany tonight.

Suzy pulls out her gun and points it at him.

[Heindrich:] Did Buckmaster send you? You are one of his agents?  
Don't let them sully the beauty of what we had.

Heindrich takes a few steps closer, Suzy hesitates. He takes her hand with which she is holding the gun, gently puts her down on the bed with him on top. He takes the gun from her hand and unloads it. He seduces her, holds her hand and they kiss. In the next scene, as Jeanne hears a shot from outside, music starts to play in the background in the form of a sole violin. The music makes a sad and serious impression. We see both Heindrich and Suzy lying on the bed with their eyes closed but we do not know who is dead. Then, watching from a car outside, Jeanne sees a body bag being carried away and Heindrich appears. At this moment, the music intensifies with darker lower keys associated with danger. It seems that 'evil' in the shape of Heindrich has won this battle. Heindrich reaches for the body in order to touch Suzy once more but blood evaporates from the sheets. He is clearly upset about what he had to do and we understand that he is still in love with her. Importantly, however, Heindrich did not let his emotions for Suzy interfere with his role as a German officer in the war. While Suzy was unable to perform her task as she was too weak and emotional, Heindrich instead killed her when he realised her intentions. In this sense, Suzy is the emotional victim, unable to kill, whereas Heindrich is strong and rational and able to kill.

Jeanne



As mentioned in Chapter 5, Jeanne is the ‘true’ heroine in *Female Agents*, portrayed as a masculinised subject. However, in relation to other male subjects, even Jeanne is still portrayed as emotional and irrational. When she sees Heindrich coming out from the hotel where Suzy was supposed to kill him, she understands that the dead body being brought out is Suzy’s. She gets upset and, foolishly, wants to kill Heindrich on the spot. She tells the driver of the car:

[Jeanne:] Give me your gun!

[Man:] What for?

[Jeanne:] The mission is to kill him.

[Man:] You’re **mad**. Not here!

Jeanne calms down and quietly agrees, puts her head in her hand. In this scene, despite Jeanne’s desire to kill Heindrich, which would be an act of heroism, she is portrayed as acting irrationally and out of desperation because of her emotional experience realising that Suzy is dead. It is the male driver that has to calm her down and force her to act rationally. In this discursive context, Jeanne is positioned in relation to two other male subjects: Heindrich and the driver. Compared to them, Jeanne is the traditional, emotional, and irrational female. Hence, I argue that Jeanne is only allowed to be brave, strong and hold agency in positioning to other females. In a discursive context including males, as this example illustrates, Jeanne is written as the emotional and irrational stereotypical female subject, while the male subjects are written as rational subjects. Thus, through the discourse of *Emotionality*, even the strongest heroine in *Female Agents* is written as a victim through essentialist ideas about gender, agency and violence.

### Louise

Louise is written as a victim through the discourse of *Emotionality* in two main ways. First of all, her private relationships dominate the representation of why she is part of the resistance fighting. In the film's first scenes, Louise is a sniper amongst a group of resistance fighters. At one moment, Louise is supposed to give fire in order to cover one of the others. However, her weapon jams and as a result the man whom she was supposed to protect is shot and killed. Louise looks up from the rifle sight, takes a sharp breath of air, seems shocked but has to run off in order to save her own life. In the next scene, Louise meets up with her brother Pierre, who gives his condolences to Louise because the death of her husband. Thus, we understand that the man killed in the initial scenes that Louise failed to protect was her husband.

Secondly, Louise is portrayed as emotional and irrational. For example, after their first successful mission, the female agents leave for a safe house while Pierre and two other agents are supposed to travel straight to Paris. However, when Pierre's group reaches the van they are surrounded by Heindrich and his men. The female agents hear the shooting that erupts and Louise decides to go back. From the woods she is watching Pierre being captured. Distraught, she irrationally attempts to fire at the Germans. However, one of the other agents who escaped physically stops her from firing her weapon. If Louise had succeeded she would have endangered the whole group's survival.

As mentioned above, Louise's heroism is also overshadowed by the actions of her brother. After Heindrich has killed his former fiancé Suzy, he furiously returns to the torture chamber and changes the plan to let Louise go.

[Heindrich:] You should never have used her! You will be transferred to La Roquette prison. I am taking your brother to Germany with me. It is probably the last time you will see each other. Take him away!

Pierre fights loose and manages to pick up a sharp object and slit his throat. Louise screams 'No, No, No!' as she watches her brother die.

[Heindrich:] The only thing I can do for you now is to commute your death sentence to deportation. What do you choose?

[Louise:] Execution!

[Heindrich:] I will make the arrangements. Take him away. (Louise is looking at Pierre's dead body).

In this scene, Louise defiantly opts for execution rather than prison. However, as it is represented, she does this because her brother just killed himself. Louise has now nothing to live for. Again, Louise's decision is influenced by her private relationships.

#### 4. CONCLUSION: Emphasising 'natural' femininity

In this chapter, I have shown how in stories of victims, female subjects are written either as passive objects in need of protection or as emotional and thereby weak subjects through the discourses of *Vulnerability* and *Emotionality*. Here, I argue that the writing of female subjects as victims in this way not only deny the subject agency in political violence, but also functions to emphasise 'natural' femininity and thereby communicate the Myth of Motherhood.

As shown above, Faye Turney's and Lynndie England's passivity is illustrated by the way in which they are described as captured, paraded, veiled, exploited, told to pose and so on. They are used by subjects rather than being subjects themselves; they are objects in need of protection. Furthermore, the immediate focus on Turney as a mother not only emphasises that she is a woman but also her alleged vulnerability as such. Being talked about as a child, England was associated with a lack of authority and as such written as a victim. Similarly, Janis Karpinski was denied adulthood and authority when she was described as in need of mentoring by more senior officers. In *Female Agents*, Louise's bravery and heroism is overshadowed by her brother's. It is he who is the subject while she is the object in need of protection. This is how the discourse of *Vulnerability* writes these subjects as victims denied of agency and communicates the Myth of Motherhood.

Moreover, representations of female agency in political violence in which the subject is portrayed as 'being emotional' focus on the female subject's own feelings, whether accurate or not, and functions to deny the female subject agency and authority as a soldier or military commander. In these representations, through interpellation, unconscious ideologies call upon the ideal viewer to interpret the representations according to essentialist understandings of gender, agency and political violence. The tension between identities of life-giving and life-taking is made visible because of the expectations of appropriate or 'normal' gender behaviour (being emotional). This is demonstrated by the fact that the media representation of Faye Turney was focused on her emotionality in general and fear of rape in particular. In *Female Agents*, all of the four main female agents (Louise, Jeanne, Suzy and Gaelle) are portrayed as acting out of desperation, irrational and emotional, in particular when positioned in relation to male subjects. Louise's actions are also portrayed through her personal relationships. Similarly, both Nasima in *Britz* and Ulrike in the *Baader-Meinhof Complex* are

portrayed as participating in political violence because of personal reasons and also shown hesitating about the use of force through maternal insights. Another way that Ulrike's emotionality is emphasised is the writing of her as the feminine subject. Thus, in comparison to Gudrun Ensslin, who acts as the masculine subject, Ulrike is represented as emotional, weak and passive which makes it 'unnatural' for her to use violence. Lynndie England is represented as a victim of her own emotions since it was her feelings for Graner which made her participate in the abuse. Janis Karpinski was described as 'extremely emotional' in order to undermine her authority and agency and in that sense blame her for the Abu Ghraib scandal. By using Karpinski's emotionality, her identity as a woman is highlighted and her identity as a military officer is forgotten.

I argue that the representation of female subjects as either in need of protection or as emotional serves a purpose. I argue that such a portrayal echoes essentialist understandings of gender, agency and violence. The emotional representation 'makes sense' according to the Myth of Motherhood since women are seen as 'naturally' emotional and the association with children emphasises their need of protection. As victims, the female subjects are positioned in an appropriate 'space' according to traditional ideas about gender, agency and political violence. Crucially, however, in this space, they are denied both authority and agency in political violence and, therefore, victim stories are told as inversions of motherhood. In addition, 'natural' femininity is emphasised through the discourse of *Emotionality* by demonstrating the subject's maternal feelings. Thus, by writing the female subject as a victim, its life-taking identity is 'removed' and agency in political violence is denied. Consequently, instead, 'natural' femininity is emphasised and the Myth of Motherhood is communicated.

## Chapter 8

# CONCLUSION

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This study set out to explore what representations of female agency in political violence can tell us about understandings about gender, agency and political violence in a Western ‘war on terror’ context. In Chapter 2, I combined theoretical insights from poststructuralism, feminism and Roland Barthes’ mythology framework in order to conceptualise the Myth of Motherhood as a theoretical meta-discourse. In Chapter 3, I discussed my methodological toolbox including discourse analysis, ideas about visual and textual representations, the concept of mass culture, as well as more specific methods and the rationale for choosing each particular empirical case. In Chapter 4, I discussed the existing feminist IR literature on gender, agency and political violence and showed that there is a gap in the literature regarding poststructuralist accounts of female agency in political violence in general and from a popular culture perspective including visual representations in particular. After having undertaken the empirical research, I found three different stories being told in representations of female agency in political violence: those of heroines, monsters and victims. Thus, in Chapters 5-7, I showed how representations of female agency in political violence are written as stories of heroines, monsters, and victims. I identified eight different discourses through which such stories were told: the *Vacant Womb*, the *Protective Mother*, the *Non-Mother*, the *Monstrous-*

*Feminine*, the *Deviant Womb*, the *Femme Castratrice*, as well as the *Vulnerability* and *Emotionality* discourses. Furthermore, in all three different stories, motherhood was instrumental to how agency in political violence was communicated. Because of the close link between ‘natural’ femininity and motherhood, I argue that the three different stories were either told as versions, perversions or inversions of motherhood. As such, all three types of stories function to emphasise ‘natural’ femininity and to communicate the Myth of Motherhood.

In this chapter, I draw together the strands of argument developed in the chapters above and reflect on the implications of these findings. I discuss methodological and theoretical contributions as well as limitations of the chosen approach for analysis. The chapter is structured around the two main original contributions to the existing feminist IR literature that this thesis aims to make. First, the argument that representations of female agency in political violence are told as stories about heroines, monsters and victims, and, then, the conceptualisation of the Myth of Motherhood and the argument that motherhood is ‘everywhere’ in representations of female agency in political violence. In the last section, I situate myself within the broader discipline of critical IR, I critically reflect upon strengths and weaknesses of my theoretical and methodological framework and I discuss avenues for future research.

## 2. HEROINES, MONSTERS AND VICTIMS

Through this study, I have found that representations of female agency in political violence are told as three different stories: heroines, monsters and victims. While this structure is inspired by Sjoberg and Gentry's three-part framework, the research project as a whole elaborates and builds on their contribution to the field. As I discuss in greater detail below, this research project differs as it goes beyond explaining how women's agency in political violence is denied through discourses of motherhood and argues that motherhood is instrumental in order to also understand how female agency in political violence is enabled. As such, motherhood is present in all different stories rather than being one out of several narratives in which women's agency in political violence is denied.

The Myth of Motherhood, functioning as a meta-discourse, is constituted by different discourses within each type of story. Thus, in heroine stories, the Myth of Motherhood is constituted by the discourses of the *Vacant Womb*, the *Protective Mother* and the *Non-Mother*. To recap, I argue that the *Vacant Womb* is more suited for female heroism because the life-taking identity does not clash with a life-giving identity. In my empirical cases, the *Vacant Womb* predominantly influences the stories of female heroism in *Female Agents* as all women involved are childless. Some of the agents have sacrificed motherhood, some have sacrificed pregnancy, whereas others 'cannot' have children as it is in tension with a particular subject position. The common denominator, and what is communicated in *Female Agents*, is that in order to be a heroine with agency in political violence, one cannot also be a mother. In addition, Gaelle performs the discourse of the *Vacant Womb* with references to religious moral codes and virginity. The discourse of the *Protective Mother*, I argue, constructs heroines who are performing 'natural' femininity and acting out their appropriate caring and maternal role. This discourse influenced the representation of Faye Turney as a heroine because her actions were represented in a maternal relationship, not only with references to



her daughter but also in relation to her fellow soldiers, in particular the youngest of them. The representation of Janis Karpinski as a strong leader was also influenced by the *Protective Mother* when she (emotionally) defended her soldiers. The discourse of the *Non-Mother* organises stories of heroines who are not performing their life-giving role and are in one way or another portrayed as unable to become mothers. Thus, in order for Janis, Louise, Suzy and Gudrun to be written as heroines with agency in political violence, they had to sacrifice motherhood. Crucially, as masculine subjects, they are not 'real' women, which mean that 'natural' femininity is not challenged. This is why these subjects are allowed agency in political violence. Moreover, the discourse of the *Non-Mother* also organises the writing of Jeanne as the masculine subject and 'real' heroine of *Female Agents* by writing her as a childless prostitute already acting outside the boundary of 'natural' femininity. As a masculine subject, it is not 'unnatural' for Jeanne to be capable of killing, in fact, it is expected.

In monster stories, the Myth of Motherhood is constituted by the discourses of the *Monstrous-Feminine*, the *Deviant Womb* and the *Femme Castratrice*. Here, the subject has challenged the idea of 'natural' femininity and is, therefore, written as abject and monstrous. The discourse of the *Monstrous-Feminine* organises stories of monsters in a broad way as female subjects are different to the norm of 'natural' femininity. This is how Faye Turney is constructed as monstrous for having, although temporarily, given up her role as a mother. She is monstrous because she had selfishly left her daughter behind, even though anonymous male soldiers who temporarily leave their children behind in order to serve their country are rarely constructed in such a way. This is one way in which motherhood is visible whereas fatherhood is rendered invisible. Similarly, the positioning of Gudrun and Ulrike in *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* was negotiated through motherhood where sacrificing/abandoning motherhood was linked to

agency in violence. Being the masculinised subject, Gudrun's sacrifice of motherhood is not problematised, whereas Ulrike's position as the feminised subject means that her transformation into someone capable of committing violent acts takes place through motherhood. Furthermore, when Janis Karpinski was named and pictured, and thereby identified as female, in the initial coverage of the Abu Ghraib scandal, she was written as a monster because she was associated with the content of the images, which in itself was in tension with 'natural' femininity. Moreover, the discourse of the *Monstrous-Feminine* organises stories of Lynndie England in two ways. By being written as promiscuous, England was made monstrous through a whore narrative which associated her with 'unnatural' femininity. In addition, because of her pregnancy during the trials, England's life-giving identity was highlighted and added extra shock and confusion as the identities between life-giving (Myth of Motherhood) and life-taking (agency in political violence) seemed to be clashing. More specifically, England was also written as a monster through the discourse of the *Femme Castratrice*. This is shown by the emphasis in the media representations on that she was taking part in acts of torture 'for fun', most obviously demonstrated by the obsession with her smile in the photos. She was also written as a monster through the *Femme Castratrice* because her victims were naked, male and because one naked male was apparently being dragged on a leash. This all plays into the sadomasochistic connotations of sex, power and domination in the discourse of the *Femme Castratrice*.

Having denied her 'natural' 'essence' by choosing not to have children, Janis Karpinski was constructed as monstrous and different through the discourse of the *Deviant Womb* by being referred to as 'childless' and, thus, performing 'unnatural' femininity. Nasima is written as a monster through the idea of the cyborg body performing the discourse of the *Deviant Womb*. Not only is Nasima performing the discourse of the *Deviant Womb* by refusing to take up her

role as a mother, but as a cyborg Nasima fakes motherhood in order to achieve her political goal. As a cyborg, the tension is overcome as Nasima is seemingly both life-giving (Myth of Motherhood) and life-taking (agency in political violence). However, Nasima's 'real' identity is revealed as she executes her suicide mission and becomes the abject, a monster.

Last, in victim stories, the Myth of Motherhood is constituted by the discourses of *Vulnerability* and *Emotionality* which function to deny the subject authority and, thus, agency in political violence. By 'removing' the subject's agency in political violence in this way, the tension between life-giving and life-taking is hidden and 'natural' femininity is emphasised. As such, victim stories are inversions of motherhood. The discourse of *Vulnerability* influenced the writings of Faye Turney as she was described in passive tense as captured, paraded, veiled and used by men. Moreover, the focus on her fear of rape also signified that a mother/woman is an object in need of protection by her male colleagues. Lynndie England was written as a victim as she was being talked about with references to her childhood and as lacking authority. Similarly, Janis Karpinski was denied adulthood and authority when she was described as in need of mentoring by more senior military commanders. In *Female Agents*, Louise's bravery and heroism is overshadowed by her brother's; he is the subject and she is the object in need of protection. The discourse of *Vulnerability* influences representations of female agency in political violence and writes the female subjects as objects in need of protection denied of agency and authority.

The discourse of *Emotionality* influences stories of victims in two main ways. First, representations of female agency in political violence in which the subject is portrayed as 'being emotional' focus on the female subject's own feelings, whether accurate or not, and functions to deny the female subject agency and authority. This is how Faye Turney was

constructed as a victim when her emotionality in general and fear of rape in particular was the focus of the representations. In *Female Agents*, all of the four main female agents (Louise, Jeanne, Suzy and Gaelle) are positioned as acting out of desperation, as irrational and emotional. Some, such as Jeanne, are only represented with agency in relation to other female subjects. When compared to male subjects, Jeanne too is associated with emotionality and irrationality. Louise's actions are also portrayed through her personal relationships with her brother and dead husband. Similarly, both Nasima in *Britz* and Ulrike in *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* are portrayed as acting out of personal motivations and both show hesitation through maternal insights. Another way that Ulrike's emotionality is emphasised is the writing of her as the feminine subject. In comparison to Gudrun Ensslin, who acts as the masculine subject, Ulrike is represented as emotional, weak and passive. Moreover, Lynndie England is represented as a victim of her own emotions since it was her feelings for Graner which allegedly made her participate in acts of abuse at Abu Ghraib. Janis Karpinski was described as 'extremely emotional' in order to undermine her authority and agency and in that sense blame her for the Abu Ghraib scandal. By using Karpinski's emotionality, her identity as a woman was highlighted and her identity as a military officer was forgotten. This functioned to write her as an 'unnatural' military leader.

Following the theoretical and methodological framework set out in Chapters 2 and 3, I have also been able to demonstrate that all six empirical cases are simultaneously written as heroines, monsters and/or victims. In this sense, all cases include multiple narratives, which mean that there is no single reading of these cases. Instead, what is going on is much more complicated. Hence, whereas some of the existing literature, for example Sjoberg and Gentry (2007), perhaps could be critiqued for giving a rather static account of three different narratives of female agency in political violence, this study hopes to be much more nuanced

and to show the complexities of meaning construction and the power of discourses through visual, textual and cultural representations. Furthermore, it is important to point out that both the stories and the discourses emerge from the data, they are not applied to or imposed upon the empirical data. This adds to the original contribution of this thesis. Last, as I have touched upon in the empirical chapters, the stories of heroines, monsters and victim all emphasise 'natural' femininity and as such they all communicate the Myth of Motherhood. Hence, even if the monster challenges the idea of 'natural' femininity in a specific discursive practice, it does not disrupt the Myth of Motherhood on a meta-level. In fact, the othering of the monster only work to emphasise 'natural' femininity and underpin the Myth of Motherhood.

### 3. MOTHERHOOD IS 'EVERYWHERE'

By drawing upon poststructuralist theorising and its focus on language, power, discourse and meaning construction; feminist thought and its emphasis on gender; and myth as inspired by Roland Barthes' work, I conceptualised the Myth of Motherhood as a meta-discourse ordering representations of gender, agency and political violence. In Chapter 4, the literature review, I demonstrated that the feminist literature on motherhood and agency remains focused on, first of all, agency in peace and, second, material agency through political subjectivity rather than representations of agency through subject positions. Moreover, in the recent contributions to the study of female agency in political violence that have taken motherhood seriously motherhood is either discussed as one out of many narratives in which women's agency in political violence is gendered (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007) or as a discourse in which women's

material agency is denied as in Gentry's (2009) 'twisted materialism'. In contrast, this research project argues that motherhood is integral to all three different stories told in representations of female agency in political violence. As such, motherhood is also fundamental to the way in which female agency in political violence is enabled. This research project, thus, offers a deeper analysis of female agency in political violence by analysing how motherhood is linked to what is considered common sense in such representations.

Neta Crawford (2000) has argued that emotions are 'everywhere' in world politics. Here, I argue that motherhood is 'everywhere' in representations of female agency in political violence, albeit not necessarily highly visible. The link between 'natural' femininity and motherhood is interpreted as common sense and this is why it is useful to think about motherhood as a myth. By thinking of motherhood as myth it is possible to understand how such representations are gendered and, as a result, to think differently about gender, agency and political violence. As a myth, the Myth of Motherhood operates as a meta-discourse constituting different discourses in different stories. However, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the key characterisation of a myth is that the ideologies constructing the myth are unconscious. According to Barthes, 'there are no eternal myths; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and the death of mythical language' (Barthes 1993: 94). Therefore, by questioning what is considered to be common sense, I make such unconscious ideologies conscious. I re-politicise the Myth of Motherhood as a way to think differently about gender, agency and political violence.

Because of the Myth of Motherhood there is a strong link between 'natural' femininity and motherhood. As a result, representations of female agency in political violence told as stories of heroines, monsters and victims are actually stories about versions, perversions and

inversions of motherhood. This is why motherhood is so central to the storyline in both *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* and *Female Agents* (whereas fatherhood is invisible). This is why the media representation of Faye Turney was focused on her motherhood. This is why Lynndie England's pregnancy was particularly shocking. This is why Janis Karpinski was often referred to as childless. This is why Nasima in *Britz* is faking motherhood as a cyborg body.

Because of the Myth of Motherhood, a feminised subject is associated with a life-giving identity, which, in turn, constructs participation in political violence as 'unnatural'. In the discursive practices analysed in this research project, the 'unnaturalness' of female agency in political violence has been communicated by assigning the feminine subject maternal insights, feelings and emotions of guilt. For example, both Ulrike and Nasima are shown hesitating about the participation in political violence, especially by hurting parents or children. Having become a mother, Lynndie England is portrayed as admitting her guilt which functions to 'save' her from the role as a monster. Being held captive, Faye Turney is portrayed as having realised her 'true' role in life: as a mother rather than a soldier. In all these cases and discursive practices, in heroine-, monster- and victim stories alike, the tension between identities of life-giving and life-taking is present, albeit in different ways, and the Myth of Motherhood is communicated through the division between 'natural'/'unnatural' femininity.

While heroism can be produced through the subject's maternal role, before, during or in absence of motherhood, as versions of motherhood emphasising subjects' life-giving identities, monstrosity is intimately linked with motherhood because the discourses of the *Monstrous-Feminine*, the *Deviant Womb* and the *Femme Castratrice* all signify a deviation

from the norm of 'natural' femininity which is defined by its life-giving identity. As such, monster stories are told as perversions of motherhood and fulfil the purpose of emphasising 'natural' femininity by showing us what we are not or should not be. Similarly, the writing of female subjects in victim stories as either in need of protection or as emotional serves the purpose of emphasising 'natural' femininity because the tension between identities of life-giving and life-taking is removed when the subjects are denied agency in political violence. The writing of victims echoes essentialist understandings of gender, agency and violence as it 'makes sense' that women are 'naturally' emotional and the association with children emphasises their need of protection. Because the subjects are denied both authority and agency in political violence in these stories, victim stories are inversions of motherhood.

In the end, stories of heroines, monsters and victims function to discipline interpretations of female bodies in representations of female agency in political violence along traditionalist understandings of gender as the identities of life-taking and life-giving are rendered incompatible and 'natural' femininity is emphasised. That motherhood is incompatible with agency in political violence means that the subject is often portrayed as having to choose between the two different identities, or is being denied one of them. This is problematic because such an essentialist approach to gender proceeds from the assumption that sex/gender can be easily and objectively read from the body of the human subject and does therefore not question the power invested in making such distinctions possible in the first place. In this case, this has to do with how female bodies are interpreted and the limitations of agency imposed upon them.

Last, in all empirical cases the Myth of Motherhood is communicated through boundaries of 'natural'/'unnatural' femininity. In heroine stories this takes place as the subject's heroism is



communicated through motherhood/lack of motherhood. In monster stories, the Myth of Motherhood is communicated as 'natural' femininity is defined as that which the monster is not. In victim stories, 'natural' femininity is emphasised through emotionality and passivity as subjects/objects are denied agency in political violence. By using a poststructuralist account of gender, agency and political violence, this research project highlights how motherhood is fundamental to the way in which subject positions are enabled but also closed off by particular discourses of gender, agency and political violence. The writing of heroines, monsters and victims, as female bodies with or without agency in political violence, is negotiated, and made sense of, through motherhood. In this sense, motherhood is not only a discourse in which female agency in political violence is denied as argued in Sjöberg and Gentry (2007) and Gentry (2009), but it is also instrumental to the way in which female agency in political violence is enabled. Consequently, I argue that motherhood is 'everywhere' in representations of female agency in political violence. Motherhood is communicated as common sense and this is why it is useful to think about motherhood as a myth in order to think differently about gender, agency and political violence.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

So far, I have discussed this study's main contribution to the existing feminist IR literature on gender, agency and political violence. However, the outcomes of this research also have wider implications for how to study IR; the appeal of this research project, therefore, reaches far beyond feminist IR theory. Here, I discuss potential avenues for future research, but I also

discuss strengths and weaknesses with regards to the theoretical and methodological framework for analysis, reflecting upon the changes I would make if I were to embark upon this project anew.

From the onset of this research project, I wanted to include visual representations in my discourse analysis of female agency in political violence as I believe that discourse analysis should not be limited to the study of linguistics. However, within the literature on discourse analysis in IR, I struggled to find sufficient information and guidance as to how to do this in practice. Texts such as Hansen (2006) and Campbell (1990) were helpful because they offered insights into poststructuralist discourse analysis but they were still limited to state-based foreign policy analysis. Other contributions such as Milliken (1999) and Doty (1993), which I ended up using, were more useful but, again, they remained focused on textual analysis. I realised that I had to venture outside the boundaries of the discipline in order to explain how I would undertake my poststructuralist discourse analysis.<sup>27</sup> I turned to cultural studies because of its longer history in analysing the visual realm in sub-fields such as television studies, film studies and so on. Consequently, the methodology of this research project is undoubtedly eclectic, yet, I believe it needs to be because this is an investigation of the visual, the cultural and the political. Hence, in order to analyse the empirical data and to make the arguments I make, I needed to consult literatures on popular culture, on representations, on feminism, on poststructuralism but also literature on media and culture. The influences from cultural studies are also motivated by the use of a postmodernised Barthes, whose writings transgress disciplinary boundaries. The contribution to knowledge would simply not be the same had these insights been left out.

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<sup>27</sup> Since I started this research project valuable contributions such as Hansen (2011) and Shepherd (2008) have provided insights into how to arrange a methodological framework engaging with visual representations and non-state security practices.

At the same time, however, I acknowledge that concepts such as interpellation and the abject might be seen as in tension with a poststructuralist research project because of their background in either Marxist theorising as with Althusser's concept of interpellation or structural psychoanalysis as Kristeva's abject. I would like to emphasise, however, that in a similar way to how Cynthia Weber (2005: 10) discusses ideology in her postmodernised reading of Barthes, I only use the concept of interpellation in the context of such an understanding of unconscious ideology. This means that interpellation is linked to the use of a postmodernised Barthes rather than as linked to ideology in a traditional Marxist and state-centric sense. I use interpellation in order to demonstrate how the Myth of Motherhood is communicated as common sense in order to get at how representations of female agency in political violence are written as stories of heroines, monsters and victims around the boundary of 'natural'/'unnatural' femininity. The difference is that I use interpellation through Foucauldian notions of subjectification rather than through the idea of an extended state apparatus as a means of perpetuating ideology.<sup>28</sup>

Through the process of undertaking this research project, I have learned immensely. Reflecting on possible changes if I was to embark upon this research project anew, the following questions spring to mind: Should I have had a research question more clearly associated with a single theory? Should I have used more easily accessible case studies? Should I have just analysed 'real' cases? Or should I have used cases from popular culture only in order to situate the thesis more clearly within the popular culture and IR literature? Should I have used a smaller number of cases?

As mentioned above, one of the aims is to demonstrate that similar gendered stories are produced in both mass media and popular culture, hence, had I only analysed empirical cases

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<sup>28</sup> See Purvis and Hunt (1993) for a discussion on the compatibility of discourse and ideology.

from popular culture, or alternatively, if I had only analysed ‘real’ cases from mass media, I would not have been able to make the argument that both ‘real’ and fictional stories are representations of events. Certainly, using only fictional cases from popular culture would have enabled me to make a more powerful contribution to the sub-field of ‘popular culture and IR’, but some highly valuable aspects of the thesis would have been left out; for example, I would have been unable to comment on the discursive function of the fear of rape in the case of Faye Turney.

Despite the possibility that it may have compromised the depth of analysis presented in this dissertation, as nuances in the way in which motherhood is communicated would necessarily have been left out, if I were to embark upon this research project anew, I would probably study a smaller number of cases, perhaps only one ‘real’ and one fictional. There are aspects within each case presented above that I could not elaborate on given the constraints of a doctoral dissertation. The theoretical and methodological framework for analysis, however, would not have changed, as the aims of the project would have been the same. This research project does not offer an application of a theoretical and methodological framework to empirical data in a traditional sense, but the framework for analysis developed in this research project is in itself an original contribution to knowledge as it opens up new avenues for research. In this way, I believe the elaborate theoretical and methodological framework contributes to the discipline of critical IR in a way that would not be possible had I gone down a more conventional route for my analysis.

A couple of months after I had started this research project Sjöberg and Gentry’s book *Mothers, Monsters, Whores* was published. Initially, I was worried that the research I had set out for myself to do had already been done. However, I soon realised how the different angle of my work could take many of their arguments on board and build on it. As I have explained

above, the findings of this research project move beyond theirs because of a different way in which motherhood is analysed, how agency is defined and how political violence is defined. Still, my work is indebted to theirs because it made it easier for me to situate my work within feminist IR. This research project is also indebted to Cynthia Weber's development of Barthes' mythology framework, without which the conceptualisation of a Myth of Motherhood would probably not have happened.

Even though this project's main contribution is within feminist IR, thanks to its imaginative theoretical and methodological framework, it also speaks to literature engaged with popular culture and IR, with critical security studies and with the aesthetic turn in IR (Bleiker 2001). Yet, this research project is limited in the sense that it cannot engage substantially with these sub-fields. For example, during the process of undertaking this research project, I became increasingly aware of the centrality of emotions to the communicative processes of representations. This was most obvious in monster stories. Statements such as that the photos depicting England from the Abu Ghraib made people sick and expressions of revulsion indicate that something happens when people read such representations. However, even in victim stories some representations aimed to evoke emotional responses. For example, we are often asked to sympathise with the female subject in the victim story. In this way, we are in a sense expected to 'feel' their pain, their desperation and their emotions in order to understand why they chose to become perpetrators of political violence. Although, extremely interesting and understudied, the theoretical and methodological framework deployed in this research project simply does not offer space to elaborate on such a possible contribution to knowledge. Instead, I see the engagement with emotions and emotionality as one possible avenue for future research on gender, agency and political violence. I also believe we have to study the everyday for a more holistic and nuanced understanding of how politics informs the cultural

and how the cultural informs the political. This is how I see the academic field of critical IR theory developing.

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